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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

APRIL 2003

THE #1 PC GAMING MAGAZINE FOR [illegible] EARS

Game of the Year Awards!

CGW picks the year's best and worst, plus Readers' Choice Awards!

Unreal II Reviewed

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EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW!

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Head to the front for the first review of EA's explosive game of modern war

INSIDE Nvidia's GeForce FX tested! PAGE 36

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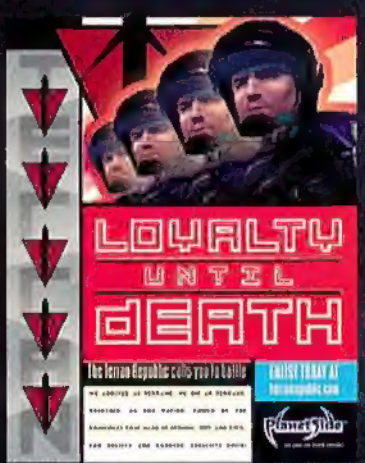
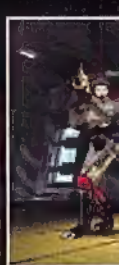


New Conglomerate forces overpower enemy defenses and begin their assault on the Vanu Sovereignty base.

A New Conglomerate squad of infantry and armor prepares to reinforce their empire on Searhus, where hundreds of friendlies and enemies are presently waging war.



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TEEN
T
Violence
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Game Experience May Change During Online Play.

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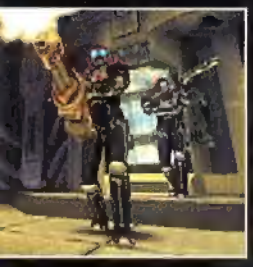

ublic soldiers lay siege to
s in a New Conglomerate
ile squadmates begin the
of capturing the facility.

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The Terran Republic's Chaingun is a heavy assault machine gun designed to rapidly shell out rounds from a generous 9mm ammo base. The speed at which it fires can easily rip apart enemy soldiers.

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Well balanced, the New Conglomerate Vanguard brings speed, solid armor and hefty firepower to battle. The main turret, which houses both a 150mm cannon and a 20mm machine gun, is capable of a 360-degree pivot, and can dispatch a deadly wave of liberation.

THRESHER

The Vanu Sovereignty Thresher is a heavy assault buggy built upon a gravitic drive system that replaces wheels with anti-grav pods that propel the vehicle. The deadly Flux Cannon serves as the primary weapon. The Thresher's hover capabilities allow it to strafe left or right and easily cross water during battle.

PROWLER

The Terran Republic's largest battle tank, the Prowler is heavily armored with a 360-degree 100mm cannon. A secondary gunner can control a Dual 12mm Rotary Chaingun, which is stacked upon the primary turret. The Prowler can lay down more cover fire than an entire squad of infantry.

For more information on each empire's capabilities, armor, weapons and vehicles, visit www.station.com/planetside

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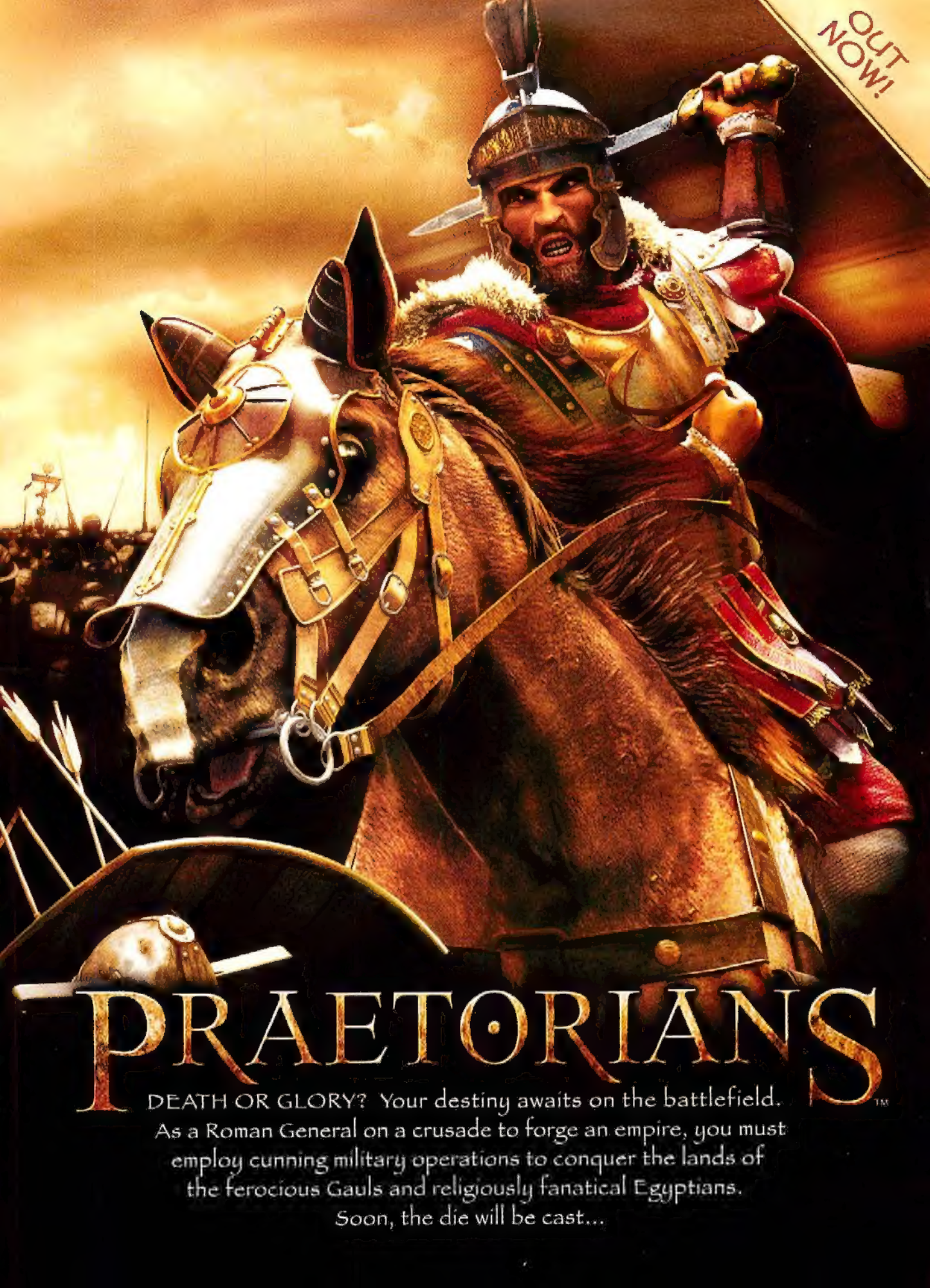
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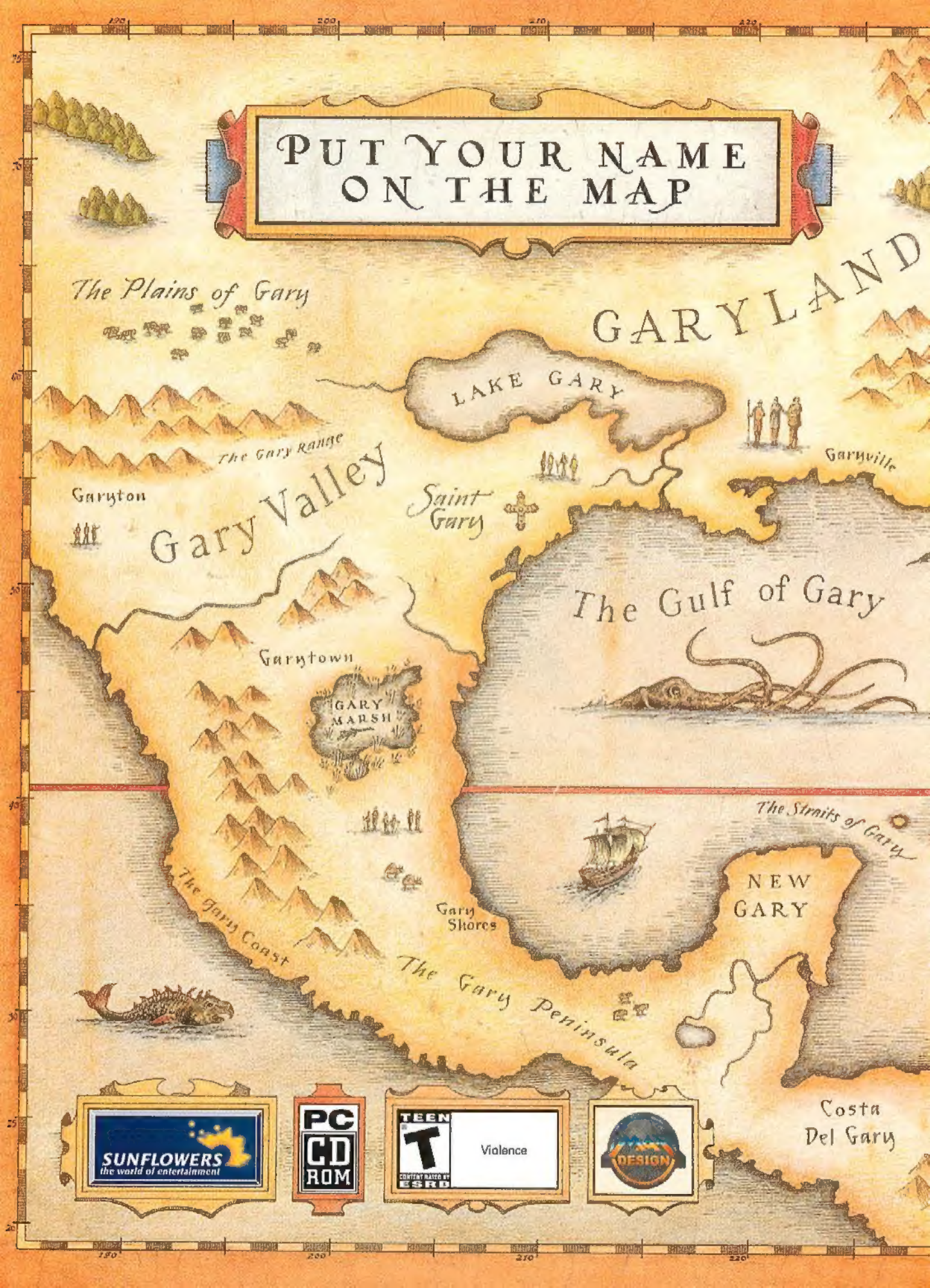
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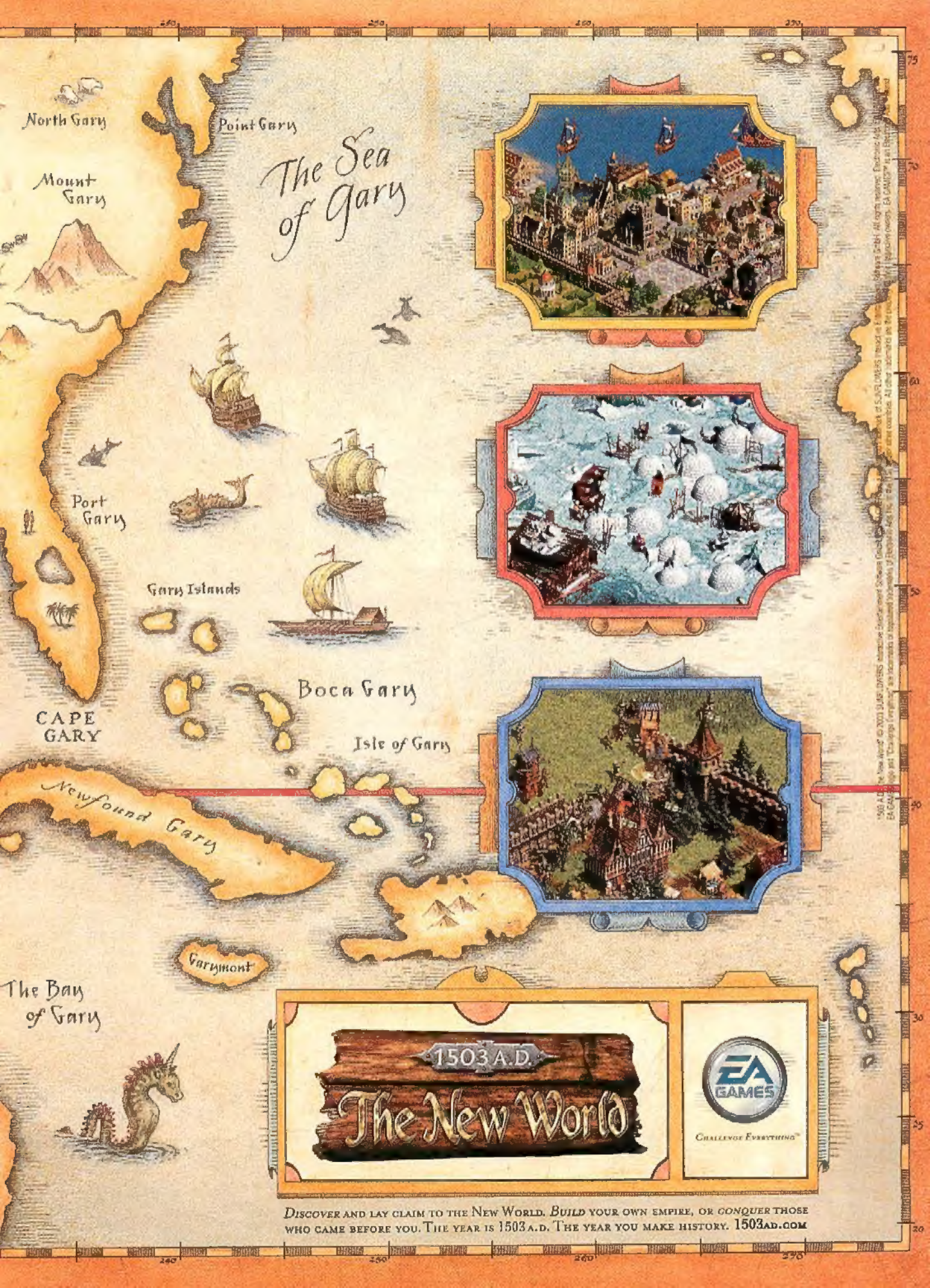

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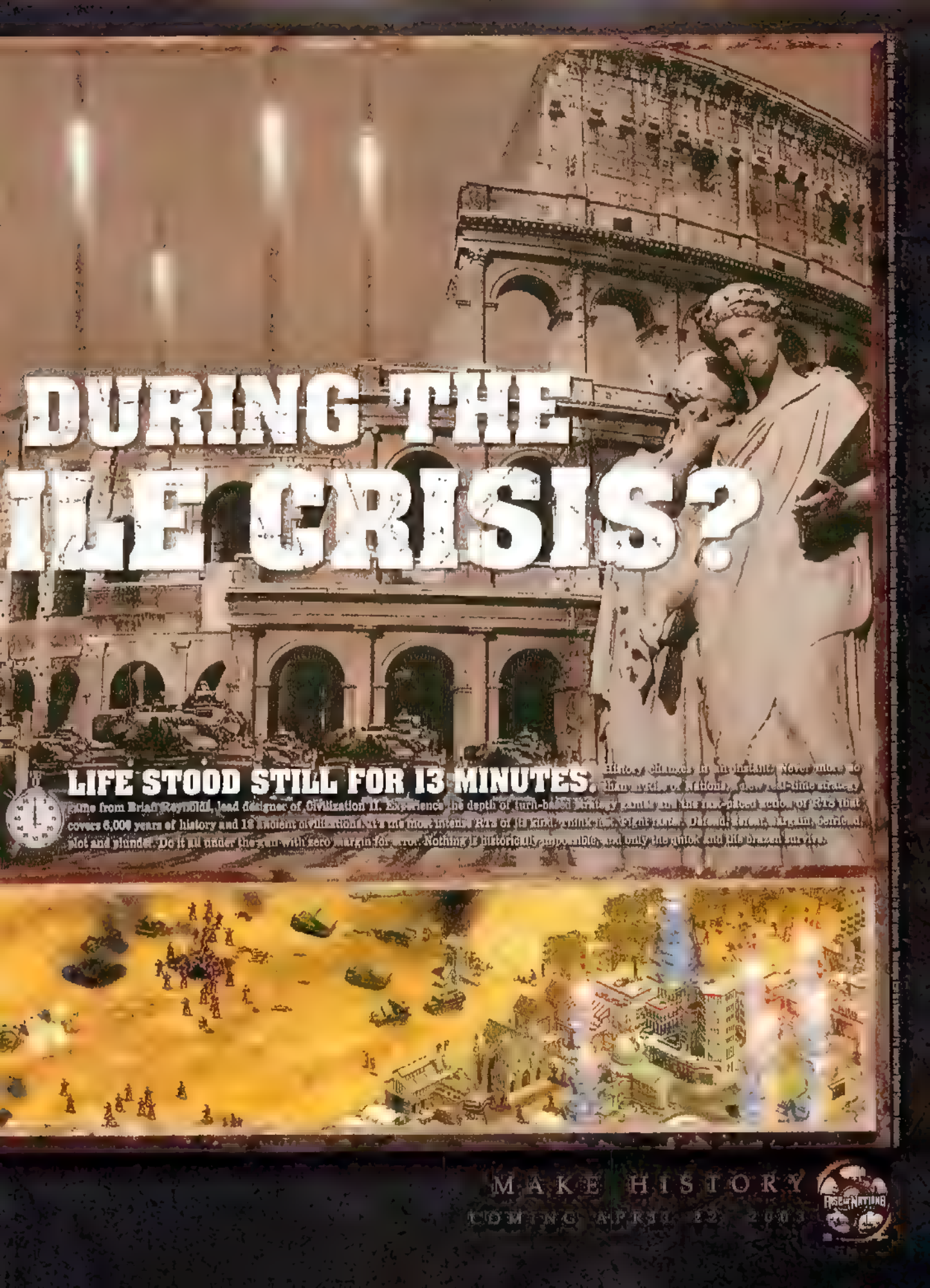
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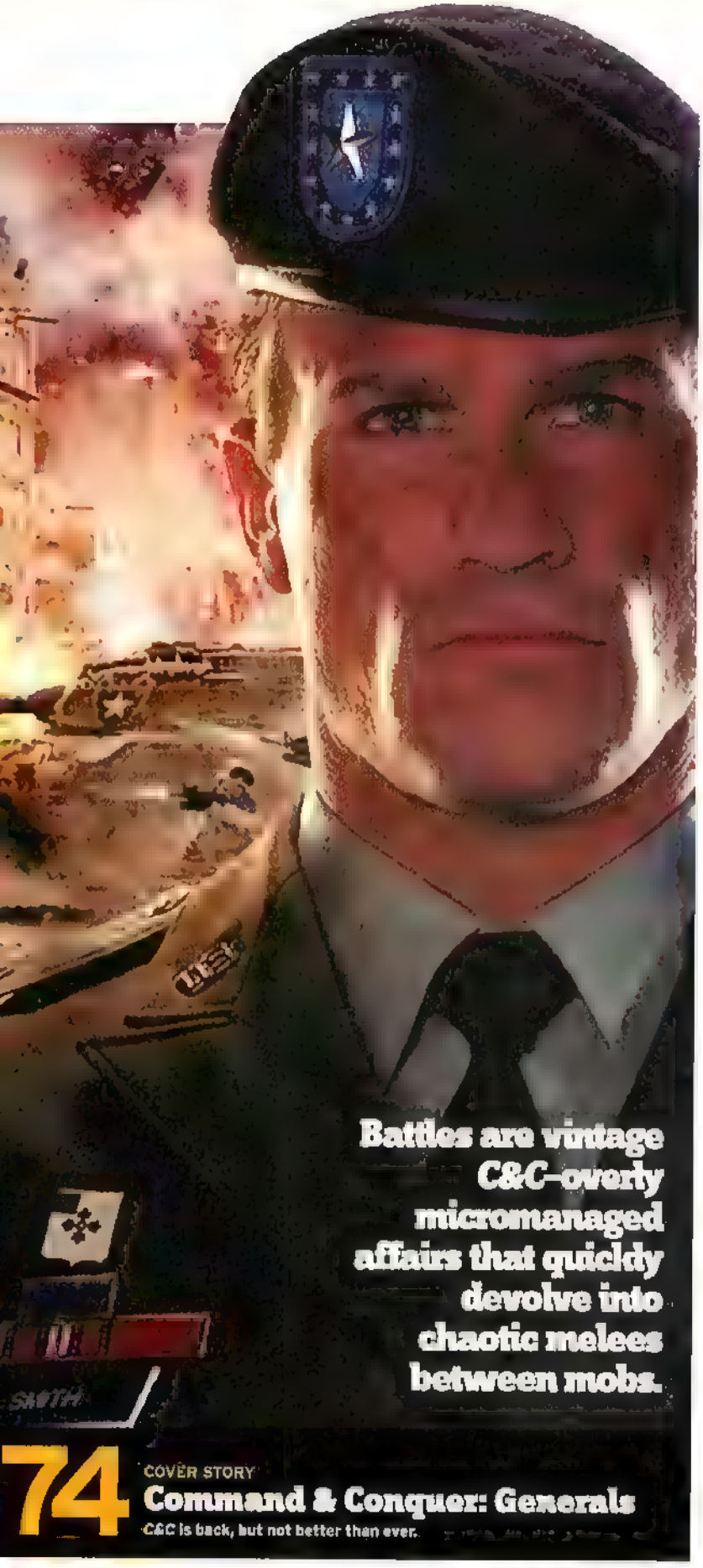

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Command & Conquer: Generals
C&C is back, but not better than ever.

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Jeff pretends that his favorite game wasn't **Animal Crossing.**

18 **Letters**
Fawning fan mail and love letters from you to us. Gosh, if only we weren't married.

28 **Loading...**
It's condition maroon according to Donald Rumsfeld. So, it's officially "gear up for war" month in the Loading section with some tasty new screens of **Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory** and **IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles.**

36 **Read Me**
We finally got our hands on Nvidia's smokin' new **GeForce FX** and the verdict is that it blows more hot air than Rush Limbaugh. And it runs only slightly faster. OK, that's a Rush-like exaggeration—see the story for the real poop. Also this month, check out our field trips to a real Army base and the **CES** show. Because we're equally at home with soldiers and geeks. In fact, we're thinking of starting a comic book for geeky soldiers: *Sergeant Scooter.* Whatta ya think?

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83 **Games of the Year**
CGW takes over the local Chevy's and hosts a party to celebrate the best PC games of 2002. Read about all the winners here, and keep an eye out for Robert Coffey dressed as a little ballerina.

120 **Tech**
Finally, a flat panel that's worth its gaming salt. Hitachi's 17" LCD. Also reviewed: Asus' External USB 2.0 CD-RW and Hercules' DV Action Pro. Woo-WOOOO! There's also a new Cracked Case, Killer Rigs, Tech Medics, and everyone's favorite, Wil Power.

129 **How To**
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135 **Gamer's Edge**
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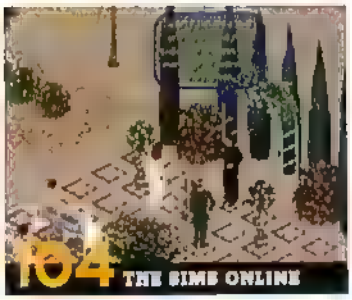
144 **Scorched Earth**
Talk to the weenis.

70 IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
Don your flight suit and rev up your engines, fly boys.



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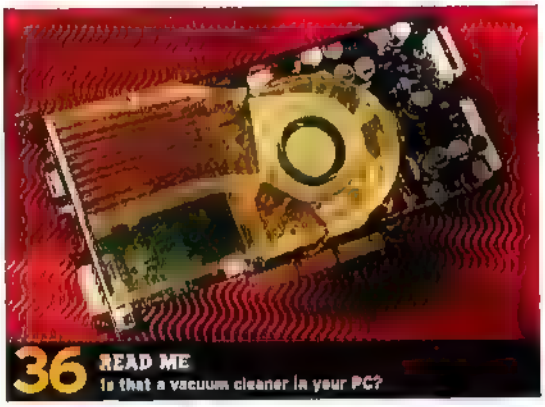

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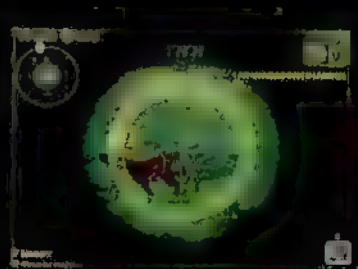

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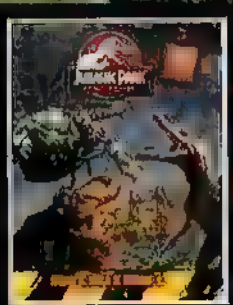

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Medals of Honor

The king of the dorks picks his games of the year

The cool thing about being editor-in-chief is not that I have power, because I don't, but because certain people, like my mother, think I do.

'My son runs a national magazine," she says, as she introduces me to the ladies in her Friday night bridge club. "There's 150 people in the office, and he's in charge of all of them, aren't you, son?"

'Well, no, Mom. I told you. There's, like, eight of us. And Dana makes all the decisions.'

"Don't be so modest. And pull up your pants! He never could keep his pants up. It's those bony legs of his."

"I noticed that," says one lady.

"He should eat more," says another. "He's like a stick."

Anyway, the point is, I don't have a lot of power here, despite the highfalutin job title. And at no time of year is this lack of power made clearer to me than right now, when we pass out our Game of the Year awards. Because no matter how much I may want things to go a certain way, the fact is, we all have an equal vote here—mine doesn't count any more than anyone else's.

I don't have a lot of power, despite the highfalutin job title.

Not that I don't agree with the awards in this issue. I do. All are worthy. But we all have our personal favorites—those games that reach us or move us or speak to us and my list is going to be just as different from the other *CGW* editors as yours is from your pain-in-the-neck siblings or friends.

So here's my own Top 10. I put it roughly in order, though this list might be totally different if I were to do it another day, or when in a different mood. My favorite game of the year, at least today, is honestly one I completely ignored when it came out. But now, it's the one game that has its claws in my brain and won't let go. Whatever. This isn't a beauty pageant. All these games are great for different reasons. Ranking them is stupid. The really cool thing is that 2002 was an unbelievably great year for PC gaming. We can only hope that 2003 will be even half as good. Happy gaming!

1. Warlords Battlecry II
2. Battlefield 1942
3. Grand Theft Auto III
4. Freedom Force
5. Syberia
6. Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast
7. WarCraft III
8. No One Lives Forever 2
9. Morrowind
10. Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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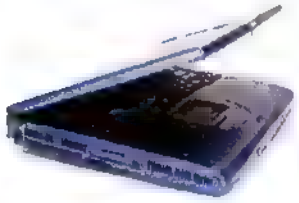

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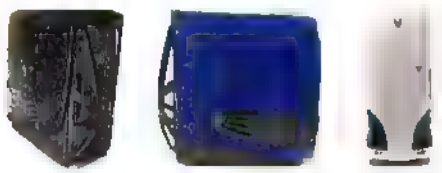

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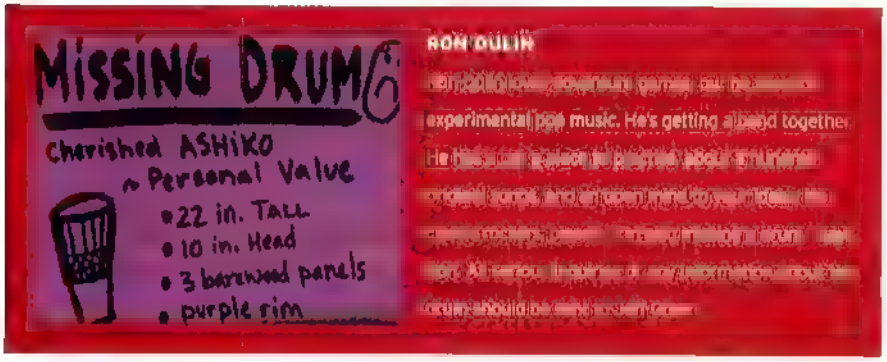
DANA JONGEWAARD

[redacted]

ERIK WOLPAW

Erik Wolpaw loves games. His other interests include four chairs that he's selling. All four of Erik Wolpaw's chairs must be purchased as a set. Only three of the chairs look like the one in the picture. Imagining yourself in these chairs? Stop imagining! All serious offers should be sent to Jeff Green.

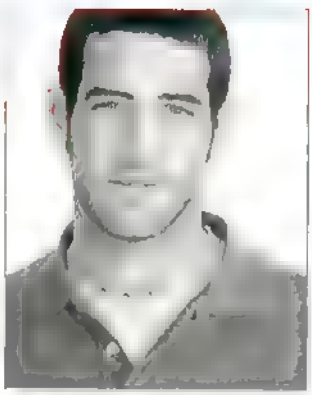


RON DULIN

[redacted]

MICHAEL JENNINGS

Our associate art director appeared on our steps out of the backwoods of Carolina to dance to the death with the graphic monkey on his back. Since his addition of a skull and crossbones to the CGW secret sauce, our magazine has mysteriously begun to glow in the dark. After hours you can find him scoring waves by the Frisco moonlight and indulging his fetish for adult cereal.



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"...beyond anything you've seen before... it's the new face of futuristic combat."
– PC Gamer
"Everyone's favorite shooter just got better."
– FHM
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TOURNAMENT
2003
"... UT2003 looks effin' amazing."
– PC Gamer
"Unreal Tournament 2003 raises the bar for first-person PC action games."
– Philadelphia Inquirer
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Letters

The whistles go woo-wooooo at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Parents: Don't Dilute Your Children

Why do players of bloody, violent games insist on filtering out "coarse language"? Every time I ask, I usually get the same response: "There could be children watching." Well LA-DEE-DA! They're still seeing the gory violence. Sure they can see a decapitated head on a pike oozing blood with maggots crawling around as long as the head doesn't come alive and say, "Damn! That f**king hurt!"

If you're blocking these words from your kids, you'll probably end up with a child without a sense of reality. Without that realism, they could cause something like Columbine. Videogames aren't the WHOLE cause; it's the parents diluting their children that causes this kind of crap.

Robb Frye

Robb, parents don't dilute children, they delude them. Children dilute parents. That's how it works. Second, you make an interesting point, but we're not sure how censoring foul language can lead to murderous rampages. Third, you forgot to mention nudity as another example of our society's illogical mores: Ripping a woman's heart out is OK—just be sure her nipples don't show.

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK O'CONNELL

Dell Dimension dementia

The 10th Annual Ultimate Game Machine Shootout among seven different computer vendors (January 2003) showed a price of $2,999 for the Dell Dimension 8250. That made the Dell the least expensive machine: $379 cheaper than the second-least-expensive vendor, and more than $1,000 cheaper than the most expensive vendor.

This was such an amazing price that I went online to buy an identical system from Dell. I configured a system almost identical to the one in your shootout, but the price was $1,248 greater than the same machine in your article! What's going on here?

Hal Toomer

It must be a good deal, because we've had several inquiries about it. Those tricky marketers at Dell apparently created a special bargain PC for us, and then buried it on their site because they don't make money on it. You can click on www.dell.com/us/en/dhs/offers/specials_outrageous_dimen.htm, or from their site click on "Home and Home Office," "Hot Deals," and then "Outrageous Desktop Deals," where you'll find several customizable Dimension systems.

Shame! Moral outrage!

Dear Mr. Jeff Green,

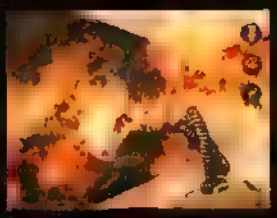
As a loyal reader, I feel that it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk. In your February issue, the last page ("Scorched Earth"), which I am guessing was an attempt at humor by the moron who's (sic) name is not fit for me to waste my printer ink on, wrote the most gratuitous display of repressed sexuality that I have ever witnessed in your once-fine-but-now-tarnished periodical. While I realize that this country was built on free speech and that you did not write this offensive bit of tasteless literature, I am holding you responsible. Your job title is editor-in-chief. Your job is to let your staff write and then to edit it.

I realize that no one likes to be told what to do, myself included. And maybe you didn't even see the "editorial." But

"I feel it is my duty as a patriotic American to say this: good thinking, jerk."

...the right to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

Forget what you know about first person shooters. Walk a week in the Postal Dude's shoes. Freely explore full 3-D open ended environments. Interact with over 100 unique NPC's including Gary Coleman, marching bands, dogs, cats and elephants, protesters, policemen and civilians, with or without weapons.



POSTAL 2 is all about choice; experiment with everyone and everything. And remember *...it's only as violent as you are!*

"Brutal and controversial or hilarious and irreverent, Postal 2 pulls no punches."
—*Rob Smith, Editor in Chief PC Gamer*

"Shoot me, kill me, it's only a game."
—*Gary Coleman*

"Finally—for real and for true—a game developer that doesn't give 3/16ths of a rat's ass what anybody else thinks. Anybody. *ANY*body."
—*Chris Hudak, Games Domain*

"Drench 'em and light 'em. Postal 2 has such a way with gasoline."
—*Computer Games Magazine*

"Running With Scissors: great games, just don't go drinking with these guys."
—*Aaron Paul Gamer.tv*

POSTAL 2

Ever have one of those days?

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RUNNING WITH SCISSORS

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MAIL BITES

If you took that chick from EverQuest and put her on ice skates, you'd get Tonya Harding. That's creepy.
Stigbab

Some of your readers scare the hell out of me.
Justin Yann

Robert Coffey scares me!
Sean

Old guys do play PC games; we're slow, but we're steady. We're the bull that walked down the hill.
Wayne Rice

Your rag is so much better now that Green-speak has been replaced—sorry, Jeff!
Kung Fu Joe

"I hope younger readers realize that in real war, there are no respawns."

that article was without question the most thoughtless thing I have ever witnessed in your magazine. Two of my good friends, ages 5 and 11, have had they're [sic] access to you [sic] magazine cut off when they're [sic] mothers read Scorched Earth. Was publishing that article really worth the price of two faithful readers? And maybe more?

Gregory P. Hamblock III, Esq.
Beautiful Butte, Montana

Jeff Green responds: Thanks for filling me in on my role around here, Gregory. I wasn't too clear on that before; I thought my job was to buy staff lunches and get my beautiful butte kissed.

Robert Coffey: amazing in every way

I've been worshiping this guy since I read his column last month (Scorched Earth, January 2003). He is amazing in every way. How come he didn't take Green's spot sooner?! I am off to sacrifice a small mammal tonight in his honor; tomorrow, I think it's baby night.

Andrew Poje

How dare EA call German soldiers Nazis!

In the January issue, there's an Electronic Arts ad for *Medal of Honor: Spearhead* that says "Can you see the 300,000 Nazis, 600 Panzer tanks, and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture? Neither could they."

I am appalled at this flagrant and ignorant label given to the German army. The Nazis were a political party, the same as any other party (though not in action) such as the Republicans or the Democrats. There were SS divisions (who swore allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi party) in the Ardennes offensive, but the rest were regular Wermacht army (who swore allegiance to Germany). To labe the entire German army as Nazis is almost criminal. EA has slandered hundreds of thousands of German war

veterans by falsely claiming that they had allegiance to the Nazi party. I advise that for future publications, this offending material be amended.

Pete Moss

Pete, ease off on the sauerbraten and doppelbock. When have you seen advertisements be rigorously accurate? Besides, American boys fell just as dead from the German soldiers who weren't Nazis.

He should know

Hi, I just thought I'd let you know that game geezers like me love your mag. I'm 51 years old and a 'Nam vet (two tours as a Ranger). More than the other... um...competitors you have, your mag is humorous, informative, and fun to read.

By the way, I hope younger (read: draft age) gamers fully understand that in real war, there are no re-spawns. I sometimes worry that the fascination with military hardware in young minds that is fed by these excellent games lulls them into not fully appreciating the brutal horror of actual combat. I don't mean to sound preachy, but I remember a lot of gung-ho buddies who went home in pieces, or worse, in bags.

X-Airborne Ranger

Why No Laptop Coverage?

How come in your Ultimate Game Machine story there was no category for laptops? I own a laptop and I can never find any information in any magazines about them.

Kyle Zimmerman

We only have limited space, so we have to focus on desktops. We review laptops individually, and occasionally will do a smaller roundup. Be sure to see our award in this issue for Technology of the Year—it might surprise you.

Chicks dig *War and Peace*

I read your magazine every month and I particularly like Get a Life. There are some handy tips for rising up the ranks of the social ladder rather than spending Saturday nights trying to figure out the Neveraine trials in *Morrowind*.

Well, friends, I have discovered something guaranteed to impress the socks off most women: Read the 1,400-page monstrosity of a book that is Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It was a long, hard journey, but if I can do it, so can you! And if it gets too tough, just do what I did and get the condensed 600-page version. Telling a girl you read *War and Peace* will definitely impress her more than telling her you completed every quest in *Morrowind* twice.

Daniel Polera

Yeah, spending Saturday nights reading *War and Peace* develops that animal magnetism much more than playing games. Nothing turns a girl on like an epic story of starvation, war, and hopelessness.

Speaking of Tolstoy...

I've received *CGW* for about a year now, and I have one simple problem with it: the reviews. Maybe it's that all games with the word "sim" in them seem to get 3- to 5-star ratings, or maybe it's that Will O'Neal can't tell a good computer from a penguin's wazoo.

Because of my slight distrust for the accuracy of your reviews, I have tried to switch magazines many times, but each time, I find myself thinking, "What was that guy smoking when he wrote this review?" It made me wonder, "Why is this??? *CGW* sucks, so why don't I like these other magazines better?"

Then it hit me. It's your writing style. Although I find your reviews strangely inaccurate, crappy writing does not make a good magazine. When I'm reading a magazine, I don't want just game ratings. I'm looking for bathroom reading, and in that sense, you guys really follow through with your snide remarks, sarcastic comments, self-hating editorials, and ironic humor. You don't just give me reviews, you give me a reason to look forward to my next trip to the crapper!

So, with all that said, you will find my subscription renewal amongst many others this month. My advice is, cool it with the sim reviews and don't fire *anyone* from your writing staff.

Aaron Jones

And now, humble pie

Siege—noun, slang for "keeper." Used by game magazine editors to cover up the fact that the person who proofreads the table of contents does not know the difference between Peter Molyneux and Chris Roberts.

Jamie Adams

Thank you, smart ass. But your snarkiness would be more effective if *you* got it right. Actually, Chris Taylor developed *Dungeon Siege*.

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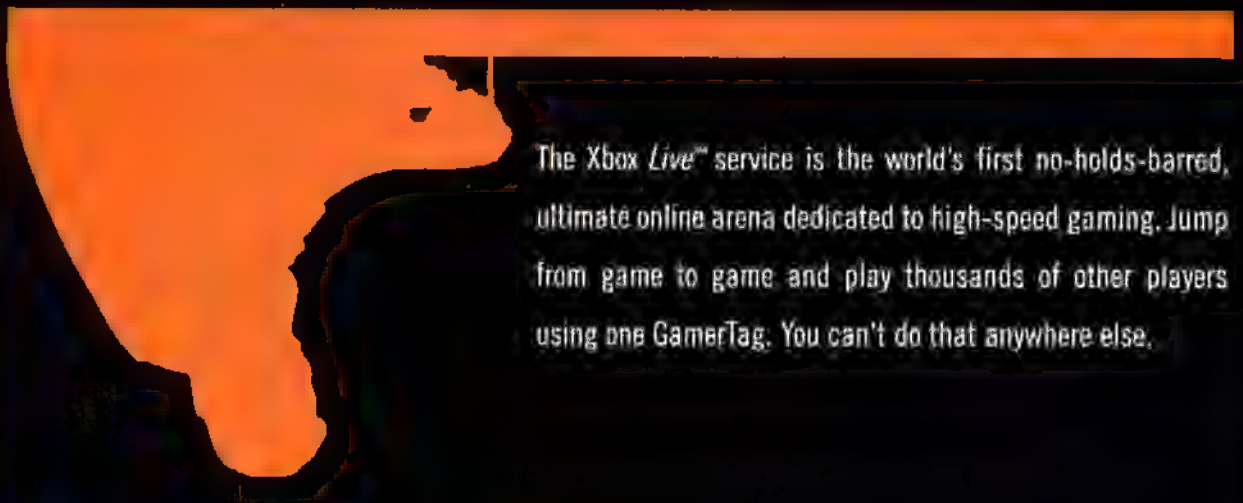

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Join forces with up to 16 combatants—objective-based online multiplayer gameplay allows for complex levels of team coordination.

I.G.I.-2

COVERT STRIKE

PC CD ROM

Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games

IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Outkast's new "Bombs Over Stalingrad" video is coming along nicely...and so is the stand-alone expansion for the sleeper hit *IL-2 Sturmovik*. *Forgotten Battles* promises a whole lot more of what made the first game great, with plenty of new additions. Here, we see a HE-111 taking fire while on a bombing run over enemy territory. Check out the searchlights, the incoming flak, and the full preview on page 70.

There's much smarter AI here.
Fly in dynamic campaigns with night missions.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

It may be *Wolfenstein* in name, but *Enemy Territory* is no mindless FPS sequel. The game is shaping up as a decent squad-based action game. This prequel puts you in command of a *Dirty Dozen*-caliber squad. Whether taking on the single-player campaign or joining your buddies in a multiplayer match, there's a lot to get a handle on: commanding troops, avoiding a hail of gunfire, or navigating with the onscreen map. This title is expected to ship out for combat soon.

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the MG 42.

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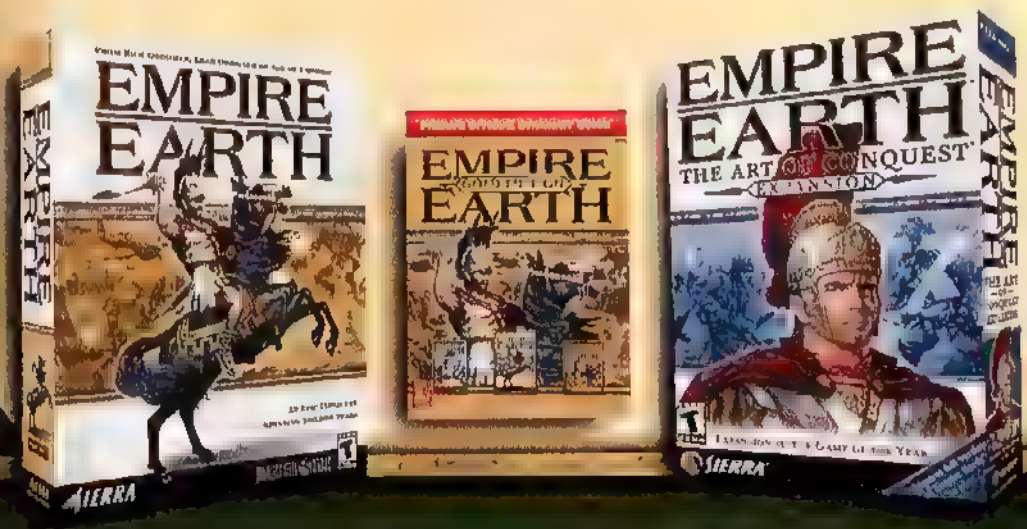

"NEVER BEFORE HAS REAL TIME STRATEGY SPANNED THE AGES AS IT DOES IN EMPIRE EARTH" – COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, 2001

† Gamespy, 2001

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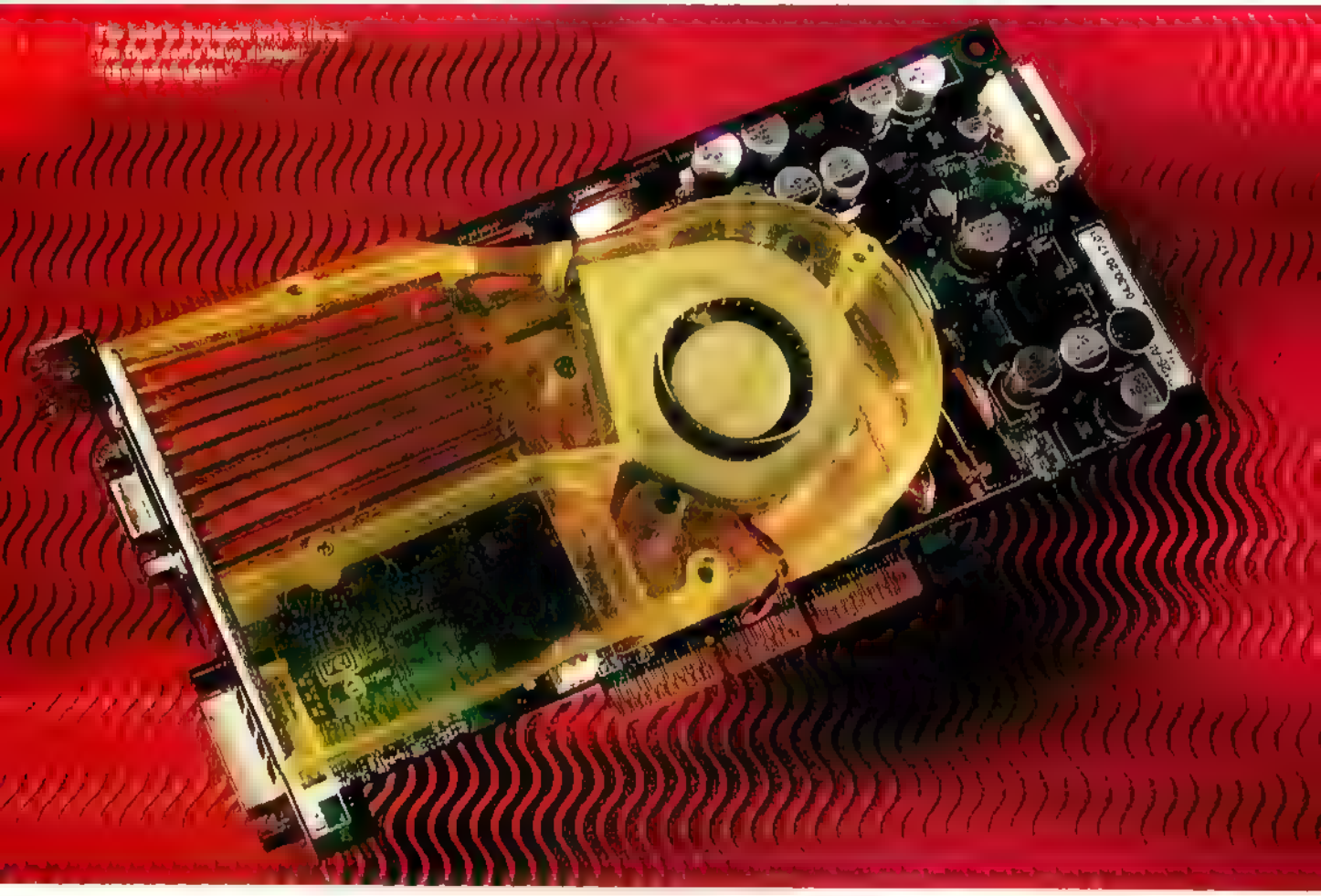


3D GRAPHICS

Behold, the GeForce FX

Like the hype preceding it, it blows a lot of hot air By William O'Neal

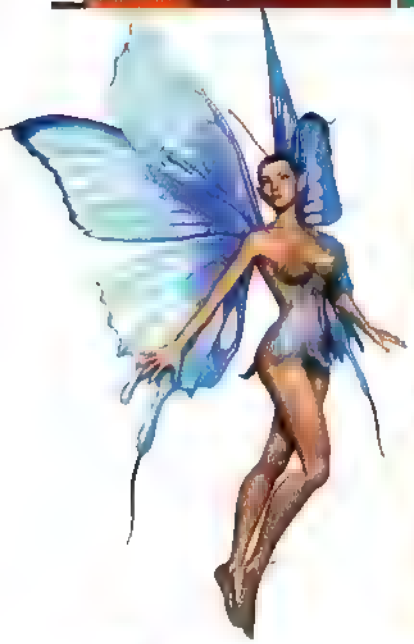
INSIDE

STAR WARS GALAXIES
A look at combat with walkers like the AT-ST.
Page 40

TROPICO 2
Avast ye scurvy dog! Unfurl the Jolly Roger!
Page 42

C.E.S. SHOW
Gadget-hunting with the CGW tech weenies.
Page 48

ARMY MEN
See what the Army has in store for Saddam—and you.
Page 52



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. features unprecedented detail, but will gamers really pay $400 to watch paint peel?

The GeForce FX 5800 is big, hot, and loud—and costs $150 more than its closest competitor.

Last year, Nvidia's CEO Jen-Hsun Huang called the company's then-secret next-gen 3D chip "the most important contribution we've made to the graphics industry since the founding of this company." That's a strong statement, and based on Nvidia's track record, most people expected a major leap forward. But after spending some time testing Nvidia's latest offering, the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra, we're not so sure Huang's bold prediction has proven true—at least, not yet.

In a nutshell: The GeForce FX 5800 Ultra is big, heavy, hot, and loud. It also costs $150 more than its closest competitor, and doesn't offer significantly faster performance. That about covers the main points. But obviously that doesn't tell the whole story.

The GeForce FX we tested is a final version of Nvidia's new technology, but this is not a review, because the particular board we tested is not available in stores (Nvidia doesn't sell 3D cards, just the chips). The model we tested sports Nvidia's Flow FX thermal management cooling system, a setup that results in the card taking up not only your motherboard's AGP slot, but the PCI slot next to it as well. Rumor has it that Nvidia will offer scaled-down versions, without the bulky fan, that will run at slower clock speeds. Similar to ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro, the GeForce FX needs its own power supply to operate at full strength; however, where the ATI card won't even boot up if it's not plugged in, the GeForce FX will simply clock down and run at a fraction of the speed it's capable of when juiced by the power supply.

We tested the GeForce FX on a 3GHz Pentium 4 with 512MB of RDRAM running Windows XP Home Edition (full system info next to benchmarks). We put the card through our normal battery of tests, including *3DMark2001SE Pro* and *3D GameGauge 3.0*. We were under tight time constraints, so we only tested in two different resolutions (1024x768x32 and 1600x1200x32) with 4x full-screen anti-aliasing (4xFSAA) both on and off.

Splinter Cell looks plain awesome on the GeForce FX.

Radeon has more memory

A lot has been made of Nvidia's decision to equip the GeForce FX with 128-bit DDR2 memory as opposed to the 256-bit DDR1 memory on the Radeon 9700. While the Radeon's 256-bit DDR1 memory is capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 19.8GB/sec, the GeForce FX's 128-bit DDR2 memory is only capable of achieving a peak bandwidth of 16GB/sec. Several months ago, Nvidia claimed its memory architecture was more efficient, and capable of achieving peak bandwidth closer to 20GB per second.

If you're just looking at engine performance, our tests showed the GeForce FX to be more than 50 percent faster than the Radeon 9700. However, once we upped the ante with higher resolutions and various flavors of anti-aliasing, it seems the power of the GeForce FX's engine clock gave way to the Radeon's seemingly superior memory bandwidth. For instance, the GeForce FX scored 16108 in *3DMark2001SE Pro* at

1024x768x32 with no anti-alias ng, compared to the Radeon's 15670. Wh le the GeForce FX did best the Radeon in this particular test, it's important to note that a 438 point difference isn't much especially when you consider that the Radeon is more than six months old Once we increased the reso ution and added 4x full-screen anti-aliasing, things got interesting. It was at this point that the Radeon showed its brute strength, scoring 6301 in *3DMark2001SE Pro* at 1600x1200x32 w.th 4xFSAA, compared to the GeForce FX's score of 5663!

Neck and neck

In game tests, the GeForce FX and the Radeon 9700 were so close, choosing one card over the other is a toss-up. Because of its superior GPU, the GeForce FX does a better job of dealing with titles that boast complex shaders, such as *Comanche 4* and *Unreal Tournament 2003*. *UT2003* is one of the few games in which the GeForce FX bested the Radeon 9700 at 1600x1200x32 with 4xFSAA turned on, achieving 33 frames per second compared to the Radeon's 28. The Radeon beat the GeForce FX in most of the other game tests While this sounds bad for the GeForce FX, it's important to point out that the majority of the games in *3D GameGauge 3.0* are D rectX 7 titles incapable of utilizing much of what the GeForce FX (or the Radeon 9700, for that matter) has to offer. Former *CGW* Technical Editor Dave Salvator summed t up in an art cle on ExtremeTech.com: "Here they are [Nvidia and ATI], bu lding these very sophisticated procedura p xel processors, capable of executing long shader programs to produce amazing 'smarter' pixels, and yet, given the current crop of games available, we still wind up evaluating these cards by and arge as pixel blasters."

Nvidia is aware that the GeForce isn't quite iving up to expectations, but it feel muchs of that results from the product being delayed by several months. We can see the GeForce FX is indeed fast and powerful, but it appears not to offer enough of a performance advantage to justify its higher price, compared to the Radeon 9700

Meanwhile, ATI isn't exactly standing still. It's scheduled to release its next product, codenamed R350, in the next few months

And so, the batt.e of the 3D behemoths continues, but for now, it appears that Nvidia has lost the latest round, while ATI is no doubt eager to de iver more body blows.

How They Stack Up

TESTS	Nvidia GeForce FX 5800 Ultra	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	**16108**	15670
3D Mark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	5663	**6301**
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	69	**78**
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	34	**43**
Comanche 4 (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	56	**57**
Comanche 4 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	38	**56**
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; No FSAA)	**116**	113
Serious Sam: TSE (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	44	**53**

TEST SYSTEM: 3.06GHZ PENTIUM 4, 512MB OF SAMSUNG PC1066 RDRAM, INTEL'S D850EMVR MOTHERBOARD (HYPER-THREADING ON), 120GB IBM DESKSTAR 7200RPM HARD DRIVE, SOUNDBLASTER AUDIGY 2, RUNNING WINDOWS XP HOME EDITION.

3D GAMEGAUGE CONSISTS OF RECORDING FRAMERATES IN THE FOLLOWING GAMES AND AVERAGING THEM. COMANCHE 4 (DIRECT3D), DUNGEON SIEGE (D RECT3D), IL2 STURMOVIK (OPENGL), NASCAR 2002 (DIRECT3D), SERIOUS SAM SE (OPENGL), AND UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 (DIRECT3D).

THE GOOD, THE

THE GOOD
SAVAGE

This "real-time strategy shooter" now in development from upstart developer S2 Games is something increasingly rare in this business: a non-derivative new idea. Marrying the RTS and FPS genres may at first seem unpromising, but once we saw the game, we were pleasantly surprised and excited. Read our preview in this issue.

THE BAD
MMORPG OVERKILL

It's a familiar pattern: Game becomes popular, 8,000 other games try to emulate its success, gamers get sick of the whole thing. Such is the prospect now facing the massively overcrowded online genre, which is seeing way too many new titles, none of which are catching on in the way everyone optimistically expected. Maybe gamers just don't want to commit to multiple monthly fees. Or maybe everyone's just waiting for *Star Wars Galaxies*.

THE UGLY
PC GAME SALES

A recent report from NPD Techworld showed PC game retail sales down 5 percent in 2002, in contrast to a 21 percent increase in console game sales. Which isn't that surprising, considering the latest crop of console games and the power of the platforms. But these things go in cycles, and as the current consoles begin to show their age, PC games will again outshine their console siblings.

DO YOU BELIEVE?

Enter The Matrix

The movie sequels look awesome, but what about the game? By Ken Brown

The world's faithful have something to believe in, like Judgment Day, or the Second Coming, when the Messiah comes and smites evil and takes us all to a floating Wonka land of cocaine clouds and tittering fairies. But for those of us sinners who don't believe, we can still have faith. The thing we believe in is that *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions* are going to break the crusty accretions in our chests and make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves after a colonic.

Much of that faith comes from knowing that the creators, Andy and Larry Wachowski, are doing both sequels, and that the signs as revealed to us during the Super Bowl are that the first sequel shall indeed manifest itself into a glorious vision. And that day is coming soon: May 15, in fact. Hallelujah, brothers and sisters!

But what stretches the boundaries of our faith right now is the hope that the game won't suck. The prophesy claims the game will let you dodge bullets, run up walls, and flip through the air in slow-mo while unloading clip after clip of automatic weapons into agents and their minions. But we were deceived by the false prophet of Shiny's *Messiah*, and we're not about to be taken in again. A little prayer may be in order.

Still, miracles can happen. And we won't have long to wait, because next month, *CGW* will take you behind the scenes at Shiny for an in-depth preview with hands-on gameplay of the PC version. And all will be revealed, whether Shiny begets a withering lamb like *Messiah*, or a mighty lion like *Sacrifice*.

For now, all we have faith in is Trinity. For she doth truly kick ass and taketh our breath away.

It will make our little black hearts soar like turtledoves.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares the ratings of the gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.

Game	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	GameSpot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
America's Army	A	A-	B-	B+	A-	*	B+
Combat Mission 2	A	A	A	A	A	A	A-
Law & Order: Dead on the Money	D	D	C-	C+	*	*	C
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	A	A-	A	B	A	B	B+
Medal of Honor: Spearhead	B-	B+	D-	B+	B+	B-	B
Strike Fighters: Project 1	D	C	F	C+	*	C	C

Hit location doesn't matter, so don't bother shooting for the legs.

UPDATE

Walker Combat

Imperial walkers you wish to fight, hmm? Die you will By Ken Brown

With enough faction points, you can build a turret and man a blaster.

Watching one of the Empire's most feared weapons keel over and blow up will be a reward in itself.

Ready to join the Rebellion and take on Imperial walkers in *Star Wars Galaxies*? Since the lumbering behemoths attacked the Rebel base in *The Empire Strikes Back*, we've all wondered what it would be like to bring down a clanking all-terrain armored transport (AT-AT). Or, better yet, imagine driving the walker, tucked into its cockpit and blasting Rebel defenses with laser cannons while crushing puny resisters. Well, hang on to your blaster, Boba—you're about to get your chance.

LucasArts producer Haden Blackman says *Galaxies* will feature plenty of combat with walkers, generally in designated battlefield areas. Upon entering the battlefield you'll have to pick a fact on (Empire or Alliance), which you can change when you leave the area. If you ally with the Empire and have enough faction points, you can even purchase and control walkers. But you won't be able to sit in the cockpit and blast noobs when the game launches on April 15; John Donham and Dan Rubenfield at Sony Online Entertainment say cockpit control won't be incorporated until after the game ships.

For now, Imperial leaders will control walkers like pets: They can be ordered to guard a place or thing, to patrol an area, to attack, or to defend. If the walker's "owner" dies, the walker's effectiveness is greatly reduced. If your walker gets killed you can buy another one, but they're not exactly cheap.

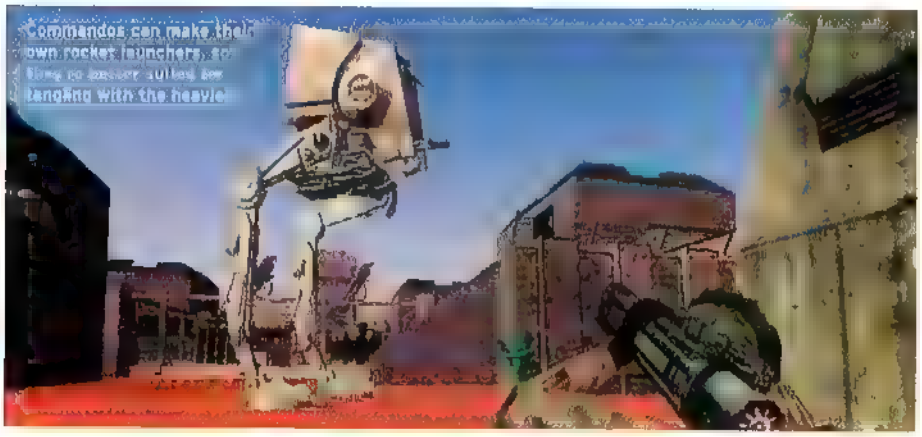
You'll make a nice footprint

If you happen to be on the business end of one of these giants, you'd better be prepared. AT-ATs are impervious to handheld blasters. (Note to Jeff: throwing your blaster at it probably won't do much either.) Running up to and trying to hit one with a melee weapon will just be suicidal (the designers aren't sure if a walker will actually crush players, but it'll likely cripple them). If you're not a Jedi with a lightsaber, you'll need specialized combat skills to go walker hunting. And the commando profession is specifically geared toward fighting large-scale battles: Commandos can make and use heavy weapons like rocket launchers, and thrown weapons like grenades.

If you don't want to be a commando, you can try buying weapons from one. Or, if you have enough faction points, you can build and man blaster turrets. There's no hit location on walkers, though, so don't bother trying to blow their turrets off.

Eventually, you'll be able to buy and equip vehicles with various types of weapons. This holds some wild combat possibilities, but unfortunately, vehicular combat will have to wait for the space expansion scheduled for spring 2004.

If you survive the battle and kill opponents or destroy their facilities, you'll get more faction points with which to buy more combat assets (faction points are different from credits, which are the basic currency). Bringing down a walker will reward your team with a hefty bounty of faction points. But watching one of the Empire's most feared weapons keel over and explode should be a reward in itself.


Commandos can make their own rocket launchers, so they're better suited for tangling with the heavies.

What

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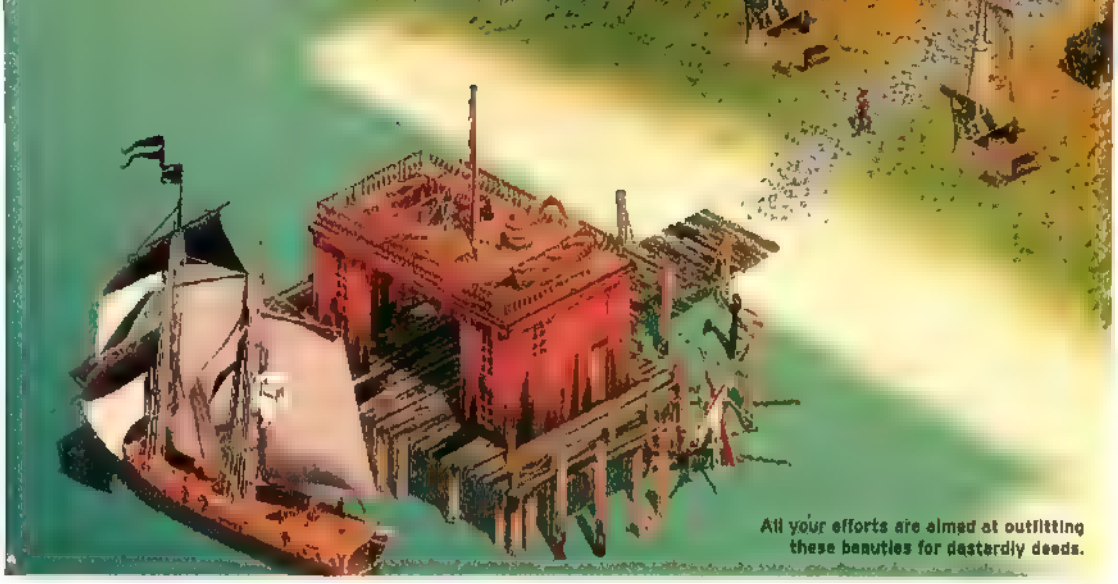


All your efforts are aimed at outfitting these beauties for dastardly deeds.

HANDS ON

Port of Booty Call

Tropico 2 lets you be a pirate king in the Age of Sail **By Di Luo**

Wenching, drinking, gambling, and slavery—Senator Lieberman would have an aneurysm over *Tropico 2: Pirate Cove*. Sequel to the acclaimed island-building sim that gave you the chance to be a dictator, *Tropico 2* promises to make the political murders and imprisonment that characterized its predecessor look like child's play.

We've been playing a preview version of the game, and so far, we like what we see. The game's developer is now Frog City instead of PopTop, but Frog City's experience making economic strategy games (*Trade Empires* and *Imperialism*) will come in handy, because *Tropico 2* boasts an entirely new economic system.

As a Caribbean pirate king during the Age of Sail, you won't need to work for a living in *Tropico 2*. Tossed overboard are the cheap cigars and commodities from the original. Instead, your entire economy will be based on illegitimate means. Starting with a handful of captives, you must build up a logistics base to supply your pirates and build their ships. Once your buccaneers have their cutlasses, you can loose them to terrify the seven seas. If successful, they'll return with gold for your chests and captives to expand your fields. Though you won't have direct control of the ships in combat, you can set their aggression level and general combat tactics.

Pirates seeking wenches for fun and profit.

All the while, you have to keep your pirates happy by providing them amusement. *Tropico 2* adds depth in this area by forcing you to balance the pirates' love for lawlessness with the desires of your captives. If you're too lax, your captives may flee or even revolt. Too strict, however, and your pirates will grow unhappy and desert.

With its irreverent attitude and the simple pleasures of pillaging and piracy, *Tropico 2* will be a welcome breeze to chase away the stagnation of city-building games. Expect to start terrorizing in April

GET A LIFE

Do you really need that expansion pack?

Nude for Satan

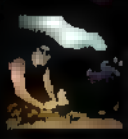
Barely edging out *Fat Guy Goes Nutzoid* for best movie title ever, *Nude For Satan* is a prime slab of the underappreciated niche genre of incoherent Italian nude Satanism films. Screw the subtitles—watch this with the horrible dubbing turned on and provide your own *MST3K* commentary.

If Chins Could Kill

When not being quoted by *Duke Nukem*, Bruce Campbell spends his time doing grunt-level acting for cult movies and TV shows. Don't dismiss this humorous and fascinating autobiography; his rants cover such topics as the arduous process of making *Evil Dead* and how you can tell if your show's been cancelled.

Senor Coconut y Su Conjunto - El Baile Alemán

Worst idea ever or work of genius? It's a collection of songs by Kraftwerk—pioneers of icy, robotic electronic music—reworked as campy, easy-listening Latin pop. Even more unlikely, it's catchy as hell. The *CGW* editors now do conga lines around the office to the beat of "Trans-Europe Express."



Scuba

We may not have a turtleneck or cap like Jacques Cousteau, but an increasing number of *CGW* staffers are taking the plunge and learning how to scuba dive. Actually, it's a great way to spend the winter: Take your classes, do your pool dives indoors, then rationalize a trip to Tahiti as a way to get your certification. Go to www.padi.com for more info.

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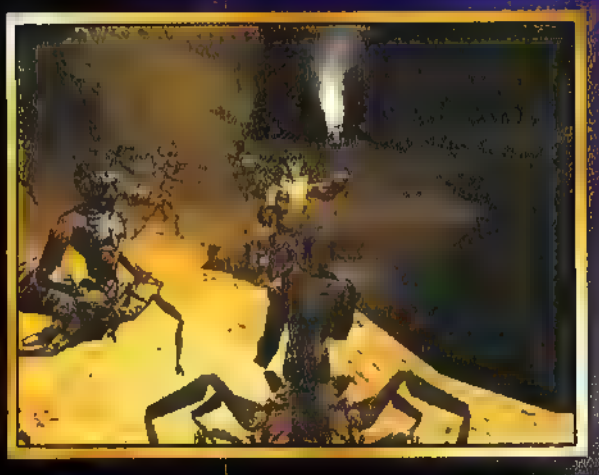

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Gaming EDITORS' CHOICE
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EA GAMES Challenge Everything

Onward to
victory
"The game could easily take it's rightful place among the very best online shooters"
GAMESPOT
"An online action experience
SAMESPY
"Battlefield 1942
PC GAMER

Drew Barrymore is amazed at what she can get for her underwear.

Bill Gates and Shaq enjoy some hot chat while playing over Xbox Live.

FIELD TRIP

Fast Talking and Gizmo Gawking

Our tech weenies check out the latest toys at CES By William O'Neal and Darren Gladstone

As Microsoft and Sony continue waging digital war for control of your home, the once-humble PC is ascending to its rightful place as the real brains of the household. This explains why—after the parties, the schwag-fests, and the porn convention up the street—the two hottest tickets at this year's CES were for the Microsoft and Sony press conferences. At one, Bill Gates and Shaquille O'Neal went head-to-head in *Midtown Madness 3* via Xbox Live. At the other, Sony President Kunitake Ando scored points with Drew Barrymore when he showed off a high-tech watch you'd expect to see in *Charlie's Angels 2*.

But what these camera-friendly presentations didn't show are the battle lines being drawn in the living room. At stake is nothing less than control of your personal entertainment, including television, movies, and music. While there have been a few furtive attempts by PC companies to establish a beachhead in your den (Gateway's abortive Destination comes to mind), PC products have had little success breaking out of the home office. Microsoft's new Media Center software aims to park a PC near your sofa. The goal: One device—with one remote control—will control all your entertainment devices, plus organize your video and photo libraries. It'll even link up with other computers in your house. Alienware is already building convergence PCs that will do everything a Tivo, DVD player, and MP3 player do.

Where's Will? At the porn convention.

Alienware's Navigator is a PC/TV/DVD entertainment system.

Since the television really remains the focus of the living room, this year's exhibitors showed off plenty of digital TV sets with built-in tuners. Sharp's 3D set (still on the drawing board) particularly caught our eye. Its experimental technology uses curved TV tubes with different emitters that can convert any image to 3D—no dopey glasses required. For those who don't mind the dopey glasses, X3D offers the Extreme 3D System, an affordable technology that converts any 2D video source to 3D. Versions for television and Nvidia-equipped PCs are already in the works.

Microsoft wants to park a PC near your sofa that will control all your entertainment with one remote.

Another gaming-friendly peripheral we liked was the Zboard (www.ideazon.com), a normal-looking keyboard with a lift-off face, which allows you to replace keys with overlays optimized for different types of games. The *Medal of Honor* keyboard actually offered spaced-out buttons for movement, actions, and weapon selection. The product is still being finalized and pricing hasn't been set, but we'll follow up with a review when it's ready.

All in all, it's good to see more PC products at CES...so we can look forward to more opportunities to meet the legends in adult entertainment at the convention next door. Rock on, Roccol

One remote to rule them all.

The Zboard has overlays for different games.

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ONLINE GAMING

TerraQuest Crashes After Launch

Online gaming greenhorn learns lessons the hard way

By Rob Smolka

With the gold rush mentality in online gaming, dozens of developers have sprung up to exploit the burgeoning segment. But like the 49ers who raced to California to find their fortune, there were bound to be hard luck tales when some of these online startups found that gold wasn't just lying on the ground.

The latest title to suffer a harsh wake-up is *TerraQuest*, an interactive mystery reminiscent of EA's failed *Majestic*. The game was shut down early this year after failing to get enough paying players.

MindQuest Entertainment, the company behind the game, had promoted it with the promise of awarding big cash prizes. The plan called for six monthly segments, each requiring a bigger monetary investment from players (starting at $25 and ending at $100 for the sixth month), with a grand prize of more than $250,000 awarded to the player who could solve the mystery first.

MindQuest will award $25,000 to the player who solved the initial segment, and they said they would refund all other registration fees. The company says it will regroup and try to make the game more compelling by modifying its structure. It seems obvious in retrospect that MindQuest would have some lessons to learn, since none of its founding partners had any experience in game design, according to the company's site.

NEWS FEED

Rome: Total War

■ If blood in the game gushes like ink on the *Rome: Total War* website, expect the ground to run red when Activision releases the latest edition in the *Total War* series. Developer Creative Assembly claims that a new *Total War* engine uses "groundbreaking design" to deliver "the biggest and most cinematic battles ever seen in a videogame." *Rome* preserves the series' basic focus, but troops have gone 3D and the scope of the battlefields is even bigger than before. "The result is truly spectacular," Creative Assembly says.

The developer says players can choose to fight as (or against) Julius Caesar, Hannibal, and Spartacus. The game will feature hundreds of troop types, including legionaries, hoplites, barbarian hordes, war elephants, gladiators, and scythe chariots. There will also be giant war machines like siege towers, battering rams, and catapults hurling flaming missiles. For more screenshots and information, go to www.totalwar.com/rome.htm.

Vietnam War Shooter

■ Vivendi Universal Games is working with the developers of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* to create a historical first-person shooter set during the Vietnam War. *Men of Valor: Vietnam* will be developed by 2015 using the *Unreal* engine, according to the company.

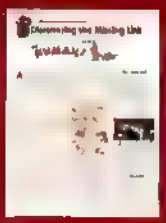
2015 president Tom Kudirka says *Men of Valor* "aims to recreate the tension, risk, and excitement of the jungle battlefields of the Vietnam War," much the same way their award-winning *Medal of Honor* did with WWII combat. The game will reportedly feature team-based action involving search and destroy missions around Danang, operations during the Tet offensive, and the counter-attack on Hue. Various multiplayer modes will support co-op play or give you the option to play as NVA or Viet Cong guerillas, as well as U.S. forces.

The game is slated for release in 2004 on PC and Xbox, and it will be published by Sierra Entertainment.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, April, 1998

Five years ago we were on the cusp of a gaming revolution, courtesy of the explosion of 3D technology. Our "3D Exposed!" cover story—all 12 pages of it—detailed every bit of the new technology and looked forward to then-upcoming 3D cards, sporting a mind-boggling 8MB of RAM. We slapped a *Daiketana* image on the cover, with no inkling of the fact that its 3D would actually stand for "Doody Doody Doody."



Ten Years Ago, April, 1993

Talk about a game having legs. Exactly five years after the *Dungeon Master* review first appeared in *CGW*, Scorpia was still writing about it in her monthly column. No wonder this groundbreaking RPG was one of the earliest inductees to our Hall of Fame. But while Scorpia was happy dropping tidbit hints, the magazine as a whole felt more expansive, publishing a guide to Gary Grigsby's *Pacific War* that sprawled an amazing 31 pages.

Fifteen Years Ago, April, 1988

You guessed it! We wrote a glowing *Dungeon Master* review—so glowing that the last paragraph actually ended the review three successive times: "This game is fantastic! It is a welcome addition to any fantasy player's library. Those who want a good fantasy/RPG with excellent graphics will love this one." Not too slick, but at least it didn't go on for another 30 pages.

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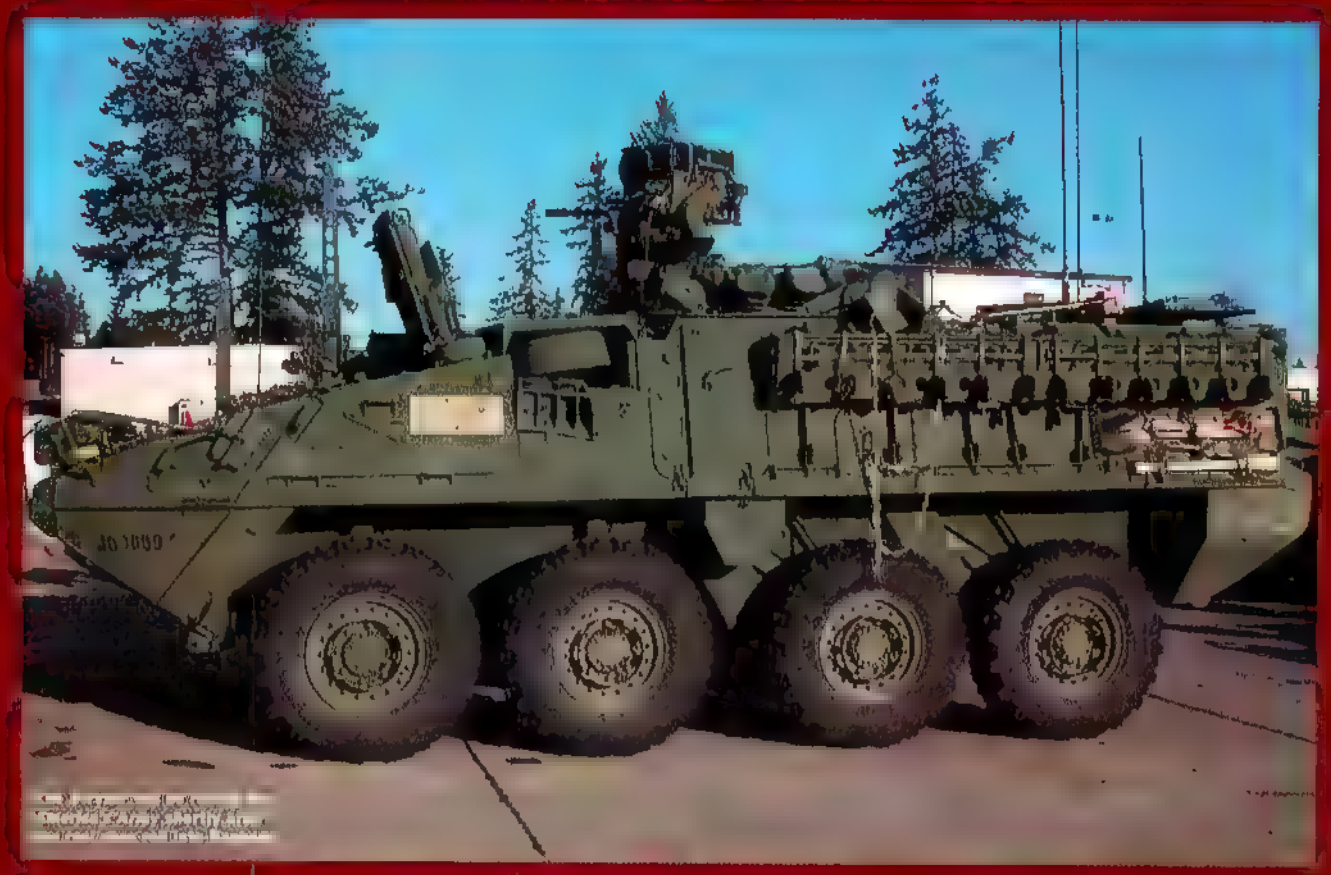


War Games

We spend a day at Fort Lewis playing with the Army's newest toys

By Bryan Stratton

We know combat games make up a huge portion of the consumer videogames market, but you might be surprised by the impact videogames have had on the Army.

The heart of the vehicle is a mapping system that knows friendly and hostile forces via GPS.

Take the Shadow 200 Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAV). This surveillance craft, organic to the Army's new Stryker recon brigade, is a small, pilot-less craft controlled by a two-man ground crew; one operator flies the Shadow, and the other controls a camera mounted on the craft, which provides real-time intelligence to the grunts on the ground. According to the Army's Lt. Col. George Juntiff, who is involved with the ongoing development of the *America's Army* game, the controls are no more complex than a joystick and throttle control—in fact, they're probably simpler than some of the more advanced flight sims out there.

The Army has come to rely more and more heavily on computer-game tech as a means of training its troops on increasingly complex weapons systems. "Tanks and vehicles can go twice as far now as they could in the World War II and Korean War days," says Juntiff. The ranges of the latest weapons systems are measured in miles, not hundreds of feet. "To fully deploy them [in order to test them], we'd need a huge expanse of land, and who's going to give us that land? Now, we can do it all virtually and get the same experience."

For example, take the Army's new Javelin antitank rocket launcher, a successor to the shoulder-fired Stinger missile of the '80s. The Stinger simulator required a huge climate-controlled dome surrounding a bulky, non-portable computer. By contrast, the Javelin simulator is nothing more than a 12-by-20-foot room containing a modified Javelin that connects to a PC running Windows 98. An instructor feeds scenarios from the PC to the Javelin trainee, who scans, locks on,

The Army uses PC game technology to create military simulations, at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

and fires at targets seen through his sight. It's essentially a souped-up version of *Duck Hunt* with the screen built into the Javelin sight. All future military hardware will likely include a built-in training mode, so a soldier can push a button and practice using the actual weapon via a computer simulation—at a fraction of the cost of live-fire exercises.

Today's military simulators also have the advantage of being intuitive to a generation of gamers. Lt. Col. Juntiff, who admits to being a huge fan of SSI's *Computer Ambush* on the Apple IIe, explains, "My generation was growing up with the Atari and the Apple II. Now, we're at the senior ranks and the younger kids are the ones playing the Game Boys and the really high-speed computer games. And they're saying, 'Why not use these for training? This is a valid medium for training.'

"(In early Army simulators), you were looking at green blobs and pixilated forms; it wasn't entertaining, but it wasn't designed to be entertaining, it was designed for training. But if you have an entertaining thing that's also accomplishing the training requirement of the soldier, well, that's a marriage made in heaven. You'll have a guy out there who's happy to practice, because he's being entertained at the same time he's being trained."

FRESH RECRUITS TO AMERICA'S ARMY

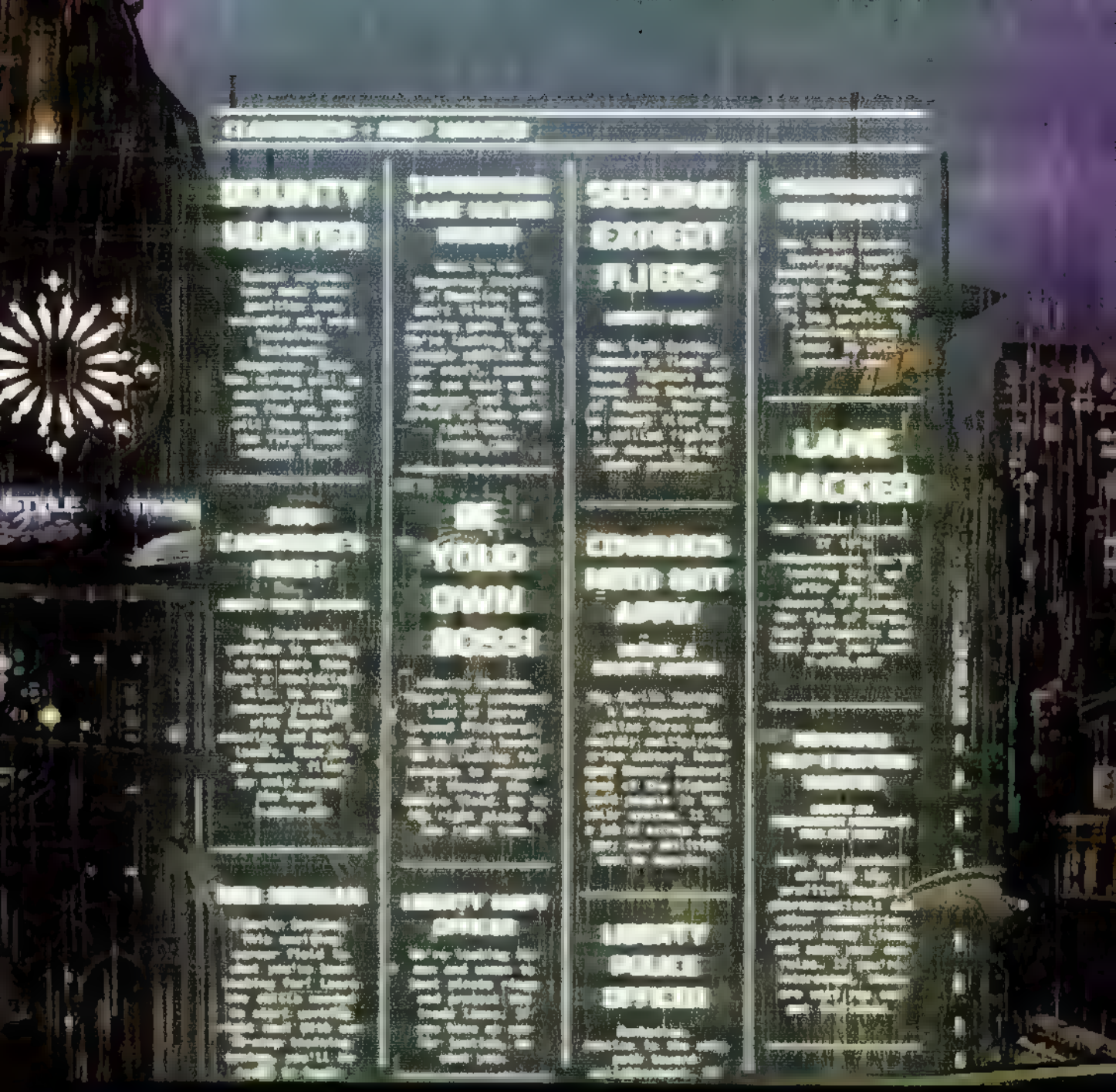
During our visit to Fort Lewis, we kicked the tires of various vehicles in a Cavalry unit of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division—some of which will appear in the next version of *America's Army*, slated for release this summer. Here's a look at some of what you can expect:

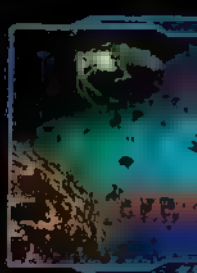
STRYKER: This new eight-wheeled recon vehicle looks like something out of *Command & Conquer*. Fast and rugged, it can make its way through just about any terrain, and can even climb hills. Outside, it's covered in thick armor plating and has a roof-mounted weapon system (either a .50 caliber machinegun or a Mark 19 grenade launcher). Inside, it's loaded with more gadgets than a Best Buy. The heart of the vehicle is a battle command system that displays maps of friendly and hostile unit positions. Stryker teams update the map via GPS and feed the information into a network that's shared with nearby friendly forces. The vehicle can seal itself off and filter its occupants' air supply if it senses radiation, chemical, or biological agents. Each Stryker team is equipped with small arms, plus an M 240 heavy machine gun and a Javelin rocket launcher.

JAVELIN: These shoulder-fired weapons allow Strykers to hold their own against more heavily armored enemies. They are "fire-and forget" weapons: Once the Javelin has locked on and fired, the operator's job is done. With a 98 percent kill rate and a 35-foot tank killing blast radius, second shots are overkill. Javelins can be used against ground and air targets, and are equipped with night-sight technology. The Javelin's targeting system can distinguish a one-degree difference in a target's surface temperature.

SPECIAL FORCES: *America's Army* players who successfully complete several missions will get the option to enter Special Forces school. Special Forces soldiers will have new career choices, including pumped-up versions of infantry, medics, engineers, heavy weapons specialists, and language specialists. Special Forces soldiers won't be limited to the assigned weapons; they'll be able to customize their M-4s with M 203s and night vision scopes. This is part of a larger effort to include an inventory system in the game, so players will be able to take equipment from enemy corpses and use it to improve their own weapons.

DRONES: The development team is working on incorporating unmanned aircraft like the Shadow 200. You won't be able to control the Shadow, but it will circle the battlefield and feed intelligence to the Stryker's command system. Larger battlefield maps are also in the works so that devastating weapons, like the Javelin and mortars, can be used at long ranges without throwing off the balance of the game.





TEEN T Violence

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

digitalANVIL

Microsoft game studios

THE UNIVERSE. APPLY WITHIN.

Experience a vast, open-ended universe filled with an infinite number of adventures. You are the freelancer Edison Trent, an intergalactic jack-of-all-trades. Your mission: whatever you want.

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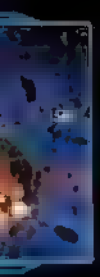

Become a smuggler or a ruthless space thug, a naval hero or a traitor. Dodge through asteroid fields while piloting elite fighters. The action is endless as you make your way through 46 known star systems. Greed, morality, compassion, anger... whatever motivates you, the dynamic universe will respond. Take the first step. The universe is waiting.

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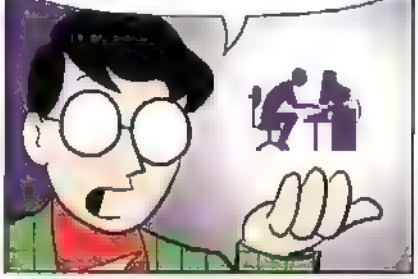
DISCOVERINGGAMES

#14

Going it ALONE

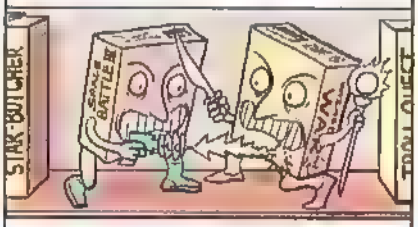
by Scott McCloud

Here in *2003*, the idea of a *lone game developer* creating whole games from *scratch* may seem absurdly *impractical*.



Check the credits for a game like *Battlefield 1942* and you'll see over *150 names* in categories ranging from *"concept"* to *"level design"* to *"animation"* to *"special effects."*

But while the battle for *shelf space* inspires an ever-escalating demand for *big-budget dazzle* --



-- and *discourages* the financially risky path of *experimentation* --

-- a few mavericks in the realm of *online games* have decided to *go it alone*.

Ferry Halim of California is one such maverick.

ORISINAL

Halim's games, designed in *Flash* and aimed at *children*, are, at *first glance*, fairly *simple* creations.

But because their gameplay springs from a *single imagination*,* there is an unmistakable *coherence* of *vision* to each one --

-- and a *poignancy* and *beauty* of a sort rarely seen in *any* medium.

And because Halim's instincts for what makes addictive gameplay don't have to be *filtered* through *corporate committees*, his games can be addictive *indeed*.

In a mere *three years* since immigrating to the U.S. from *Indonesia*, Halim has created more than *36 new games* using off-the-shelf tools like *Flash*. Each game has its own *personality*, but they all reflect the childlike joy of *invention* that makes Halim's work *unique*.

"If you're developing by yourself, you don't have to follow anyone's orders," says Halim. *"I'm not a follower."*

It'll be interesting to see if any of the *thousands* of kids who *play* his games every day and gain access to those *same tools* as they get *older* --

-- will *follow* his *lead*.

*Halim creates all of the games himself, though he often seeks outside sources for the music. His games are available at www.orisinal.com

UNPLUGGED

Civilization: The Boardgame

Eagle Games pulls off a decent conversion of Sid Meier's classic By David Wilson

It's not for everyone, but Sid Meier's *Civilization: The Boardgame* will interest some PC players. Especially if you're into boardgames, or you've always wanted to play *Civ* multiplayer and you got tired downloading the latest patch of *Play the World*.

The $60 boardgame includes a treasure trove of little plastic pieces: men, ships, artillery, aircraft—nearly 800 miniatures in all. There are multiple types of cards representing the cities, the technologies, and the wonders. It also includes a giant game board—46x36 inches—that is so big that it comes in three pieces. The sections often get separated, requiring frequent repositioning unless you tape them together.

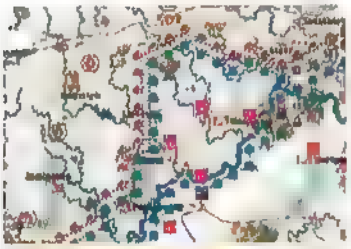
But the game authentically adapts the PC game, and the flow feels right. The initial phase of the game centers on exploration for eight different resources (oil, wine, rare metals, horses, iron, spices, coal, and gems). Players have to consider such matters as Happiness in their cities using some of the same variables found in the PC game. Advancements in technology also play a big role.

Unfortunately, combat has much more of a "rock, scissors, paper" feel than the PC game. When two forces meet, only one piece from each force can fight. If the players have more than one type of force (infantry, cavalry, or artillery) then each player chooses a piece to fight with. The choices determine one's advantage or disadvantage in the form of a die roll modifier, a modifier that often proves decisive.

Combat has much more of a "rock, scissors, paper" feel than the PC game.

Overall, the game plays like a cross between Avalon Hill's *History of the World* and Rio Grande's *Puerto Rico*. But fans of the PC game will not be disappointed. And if this game interests you, check out Eagle Games' upcoming conversion of *Age of Mythology*, scheduled for this spring.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HAYDEN HOLSER



RECON

New Wargame From SSG

Matrix Games releases Keating and Trout's *Korsun Pocket* By Bruce Geryk

Strategic Studies Group isn't a big-name developer like Blizzard, and their games aren't as flashy, but SSG's games shine where it counts the most: gameplay. In fact, many people consider SSG's *Warlords Battlecry II* a better all-around game than *WarCraft III* when you take out the gorgeous cinematics. Part of the reason for their success is a relentless focus on A.I., which is a specialty of legendary designers Roger Keating and Ian Trout.

Keating and Trout are probably better known among wargamers for their landmark *Carriers at War*. It's been a while since the two released a new wargame, but by the time you read this, their new *Korsun Pocket* will be available from Matrix Games. The name refers to the desperate German attempt to break out of a Russian encirclement on the Eastern Front in early 1944.

As a bonus, *Korsun Pocket* will include an updated version of SSG's *The Ardennes Offensive* (which inaugurated the system used in *Korsun Pocket*). SSG previously released an updated, free version of *The Ardennes Offensive* on the Internet (sans music and sound), but according to Matrix Games' director of operations David Heath, this one is a "whole new ballgame."

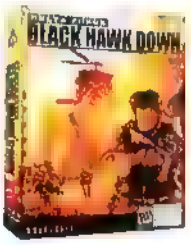
You can still get the free version of *The Ardennes Offensive* at www.ssgus.com/ardennes-download.htm. For more information about *Korsun Pocket*, see www.matrixgames.com.

If you liked *Warlords Battlecry II*, then check out this game.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

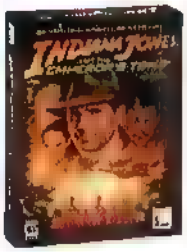
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(LucasArts)* A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down *(Novalogic)* Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire. Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives using combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Force Soldiers.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 Raven Shield *(Red Storm)* Command an elite, multinational squad of special operatives against a hidden terrorist foe. Race against time to stop terror and unravel a mystery. Lead your team in a desperate effort to battle a madman and foil his doomsday plot.



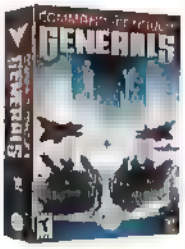
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb *(LucasArts)* Join Indy as he travels to 1935 China to prevent a powerful art fact from falling into evil hands. You'll leap, punch, climb, and swim, in a race against evil Nazis and the Asian underworld to possess the mysterious Heart of the Dragon.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

Unreal 2: The Awakening *(Infogrames)* The long awaited follow-up to the ground breaking single player opus *Unreal*. This sequel has the same absorbing story-driven gameplay, ferocious enemies, and nail-biting tension that made the original title the top choice for first-person action fans worldwide.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell *(Ubi Soft)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWIII.

Master of Orion 3 *(Infogrames)* Play one of 16 unique star-faring races or create your own custom race, and explore rich solar systems, complete with jump lanes, worm holes and hostile alien races. Engage in Colossal Space Battles that feature beautiful, tactical real-time combat resolution.



Command & Conquer: Generals *(Electronic Arts)* The U.S. and China are fighting against a rogue terrorist-like state, the Global Liberation Army. The game supports well-developed air-to-air combat, a new feature for a C&C game, and new units and tactics that build on all the fun from past C&C games.

Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome *(Electronic Arts)* Up to six new maps to fight on, including Operation Husky (Sicily) and the battles for Anzio and Monte Cassino. This multiplayer-focused expansion pack gives you more of everything—maps, vehicles, weapons, and more fighting forces.

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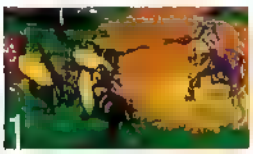
SURVEY

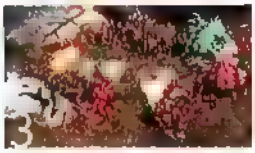
CGW Top 20

It's Blizzard's world—we just live in it



Tons of gamers think *WarCraft III* is pixel-perfect.

GTA3 rules, but now we're hungry for *Vice City*.



Lord of Destruction: quality add-on, dude.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	**WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★☆
2	**Grand Theft Auto III** (Take 2)	★★★★★
3	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★★
4	**Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** (LucasArts)	★★★★½
5	**Medal of Honor: Allied Assault** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
6	**Unreal Tournament 2003** (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
7	**Battlefield 1942** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
8	**Neverwinter Nights** (Infogrames)	★★★★½
9	**The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind** (Bethesda)	★★★★★
10	**Hitman 2**	★★★★½
11	**SimCity 4** (Electronic Arts/Maxis)	★★★★☆
12	**TIE–Age of Mythology** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
12	**TIE–No One Lives Forever 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½
14	**Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal** (Interplay)	★★★★★
15	**Sid Meier's Civilization III** (Infogrames)	★★★★★
16	**Mafia** (Take 2)	★★★½☆
17	**RollerCoaster Tycoon 2** (Infogrames)	★★★½☆
18	**TIE–Dungeon Siege** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
18	**TIE–The Sims Online** (Electronic Arts/Maxis)	★★★½☆
20	**Aliens Versus Predator 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES

Ultima Online: Age of Shadows
(Electronic Arts)

Regular Price: ~~$39.99~~
Sale Price! $24.99

The game's most aggressive expansion pack to date. Get ready for a new level of customization and personalization. Lead the life you were born to live!

Features:
- Latest edition of the popular massively multiplayer online fantasy rpg
- Explore a new land for adventure and settlement, which adds over 40,000 houses to the game
- New custom house design tool lets you place custom features wherever you like

Freelancer
(Microsoft)

Regular Price: ~~$54.99~~
Sale Price! $44.99

Adventure, intrigue, and opportunity in an insanely epic and fascinating science-fiction universe.

Features:
- Open-ended universe open for exploration
- Game advances based on decisions players make
- Players' reputations constantly evolve as they choose their missions, make allies or enemies and succeed or fail.
- Choice of distinctive styles of play for different gameplay experiences.

Unreal 2: The Awakening
(Infogrames)

Regular Price: ~~$49.99~~
Sale Price! $44.99

New technology delivers intense life or-death action in the most breathtaking scenery and environments ever displayed in a computer game.

Features:
- Intense first-person shooter action combined with the magic of exploration and RPG-style character interaction
- Unique tactical challenges in each mission
- Tools for amateur level designers and mod makers

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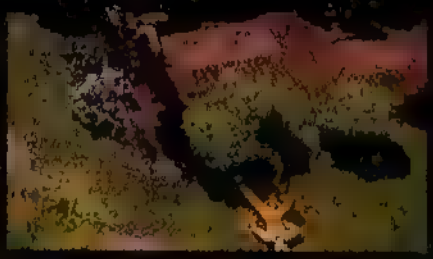
PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the channel By Di Luo

There's a world where games actually ship on time, where games never need patching and PCs never crash. Where giddy lingerie models bring you drinks and rub your feet when your gaming is done. But that ain't the world we live in, dude.

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC: BioWare is developing this RPG and action hybrid for both the PC and Xbox. As a Jedi in the Old Republic 4,000 years before the movies, your party of three is fighting against thousands of Siths in a galactic war. Originally scheduled for a Q1 release from LucasArts, it's been delayed significantly. Lucas hasn't explained the situation, but according to their website, *KOTOR* won't hit the shelves till fall of 2003 for PC, and June for the Xbox.

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO: This single-player version of the popular multiplayer *Half-Life* mod has had a journey more laborious than Ulysses. It's changed developers several times before settling down with Ritual Entertainment. We visited them recently and were impressed by what we saw. Despite having to redo most of the game, they seem on target and you should see the game by May. See the gameplay trailer on this month's demo disc and check out our full preview coming next month.



SILENT STORM: For years, publishers have balked at any game unlucky enough to earn the label "turn-based." Sequels of great games like *X-Com* and *Jagged Alliance* were often cancelled because they were considered too difficult or obscure to sell. Thankfully, the Europeans are still "backwards" enough to make these games. Russian developer Nival Interactive is currently working on *Silent Storm*, a turn-based 3D strategy game that takes place during an alternate history World War II. It's planned for release from JoWood in Q4 2003. We'll give you more details on the game in a full preview coming soon.

1503 A.D. The New World	EA	Q2 2003
All Americas: The 82nd Airborne	Shrapnel	Q2 2003
American McGee's Oz	Carbon 6	Q2 2004
Battlecruiser Generations	Dreamcatcher	Q3 2003
Black Moon Chronicles: Winds of War	Cryo Networks	Unknown
Blitzkrieg	CDV	Q2 2003
Breed	CDV	Q2 2003
Bubb Rubb's Whistle Tip Rally	Lil' Sis	Woo-wooooo!
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Civil War: War Between the States	Walker Boys	Unknown
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q2 2003
Cossacks: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Q3 2003
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	Q2 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Deadlands	Headfirst	Q3 2003
Devastation	Arush	Q2 2003
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Q1 2003
Deus Ex: The Invisible War	Eidos	Q2 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q2 2003
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q3 2003
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Empire: Dawn of the New World	Activision	When it's done
Enter the Matrix	Infogrames	5/15/03
Escape From Alcatraz	NIF	Q1 2003
Etherlords 2	Strategy First	Q2 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003

Freelancer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Full Throttle 2	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	Q1 2003
Gothic II	JoWood	Q1 2003
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Q2 2003
Hannibal	Arxel Tribe	Q2 2004
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Heaven and Hell	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q2 2003
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Q2 2003
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q2 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Max Payne II	GOD Games	Unknown
Medal of Honor 2	EA	Q1 2004
Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	Q1 2003
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Infogrames	Q1 2003
Painkiller	Dreamcatcher	Q2 2003
PlanetSide	Sony	Q1 2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Quake 4	Activision	After DOOM III
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003
Rolling Thunder	Strategy First	Q2 2003
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q4 2003

Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Savage	Gamian	Q2 2003
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	Q3 2003
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Silent Storm	JoWood	Q4 2003
Sovereign	Sony	Unknown
Stars! Supernova Genesis	Mare Crisium	Q1 2003
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual	Q2 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q4/Q5/03
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Stalker: Oblivion Lost	GSC	Q4 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Unknown
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
The Movies	Lionhead	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Motor	Q2 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q3 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q2 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tribes Game	Sierra	Unknown
Trion 2.0	Monolith	Q2 2003
Tropico 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Vulcanus	CDV	Q4 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q2 2003
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Blizzard	Q3 2003
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

NEW UPDATE

DETAIL #66212

ITEM. Windshield debris

TAKEN FROM #12 ALLTEL windshield at North Carolina Speedway.

NOTES. Simulate native cicada (aka *Tibicen chloromera*) for realistic Rockingham visibility

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SIERRA

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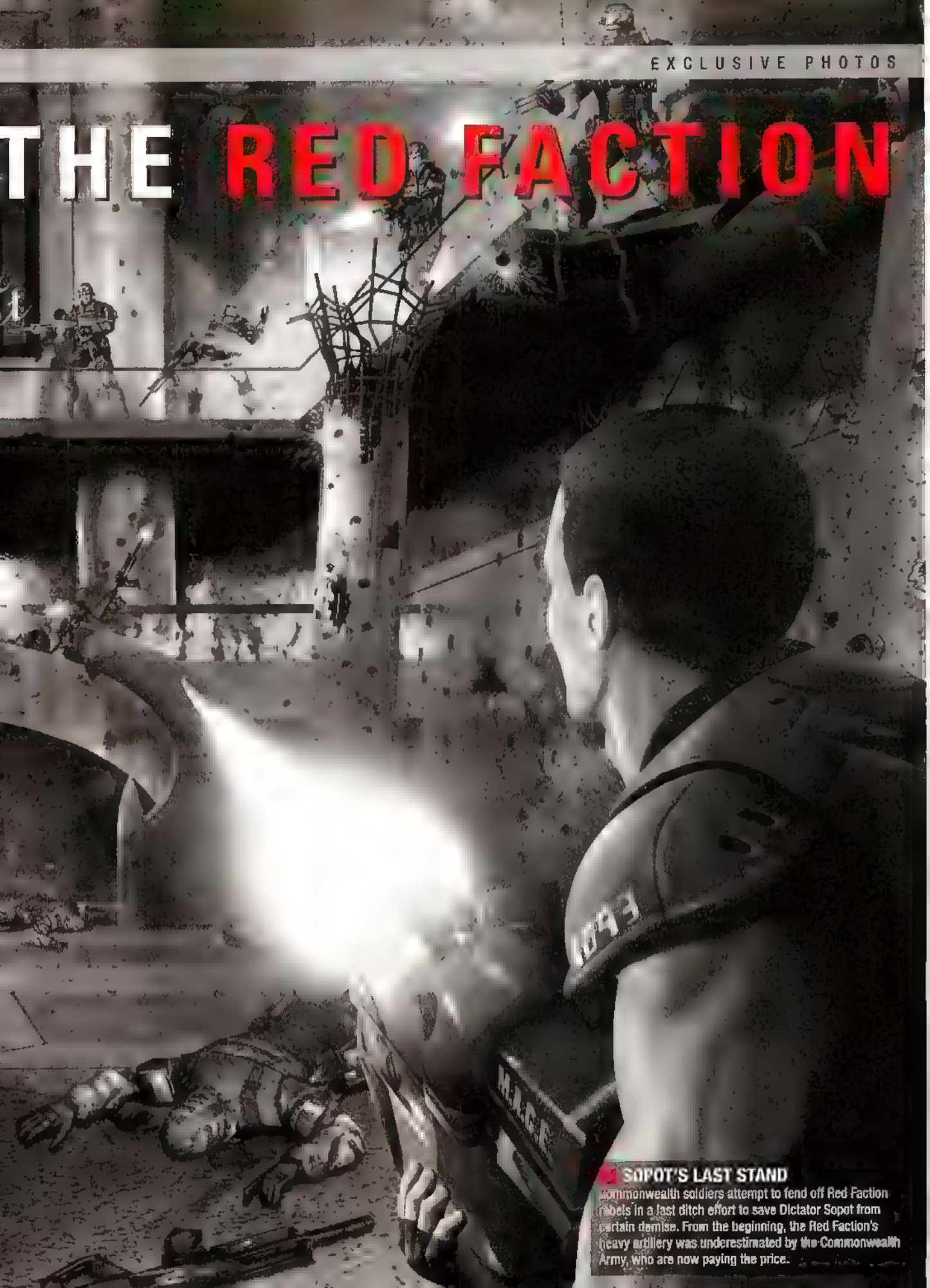
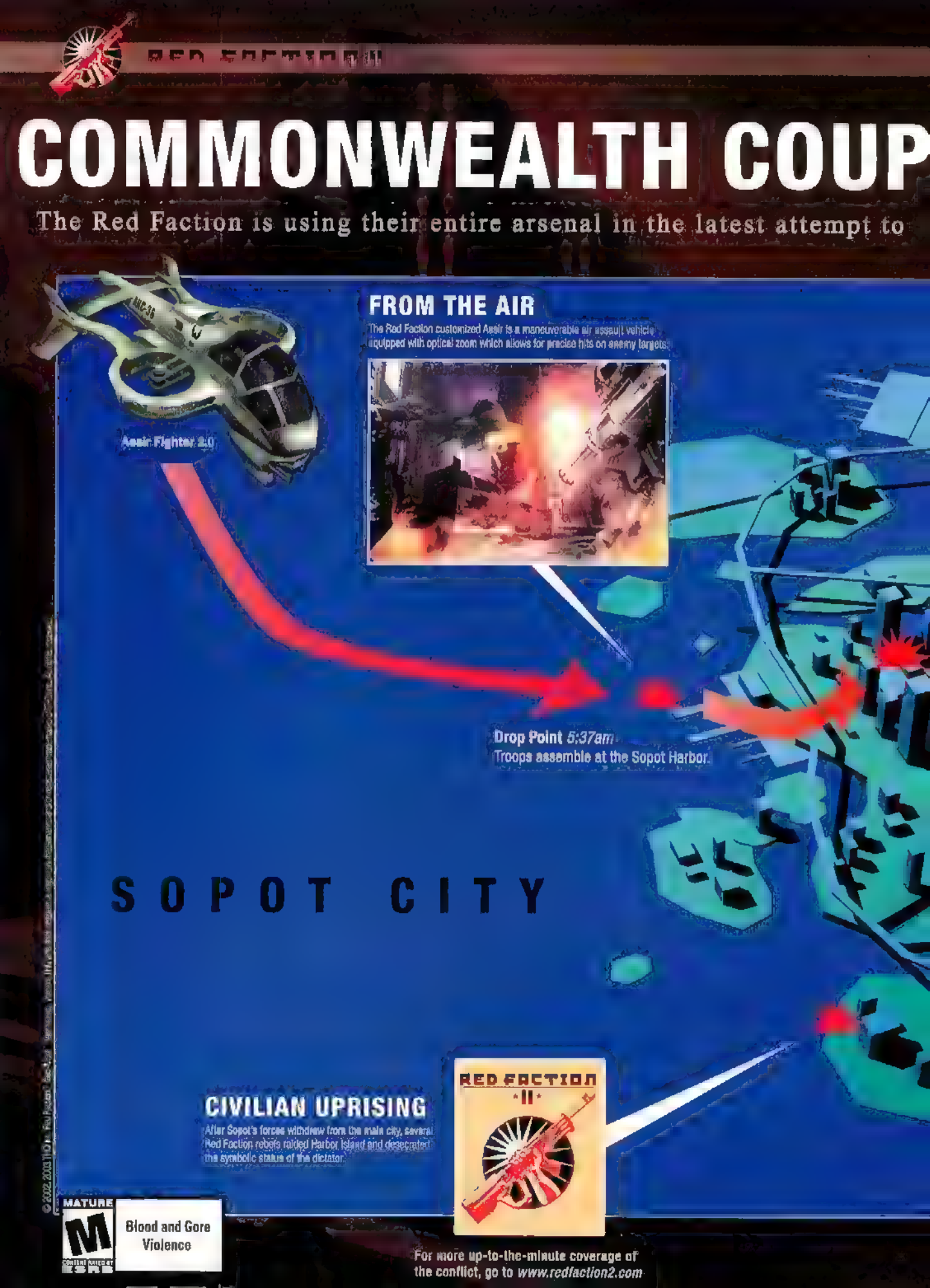
THE PLIGHT OF

THE RED FACTION



SOPOT'S LAST STAND
Commonwealth soldiers attempt to fend off Red Faction rebels in a last ditch effort to save Dictator Sopot from certain demise. From the beginning, the Red Faction's heavy artillery was underestimated by the Commonwealth Army, who are now paying the price.

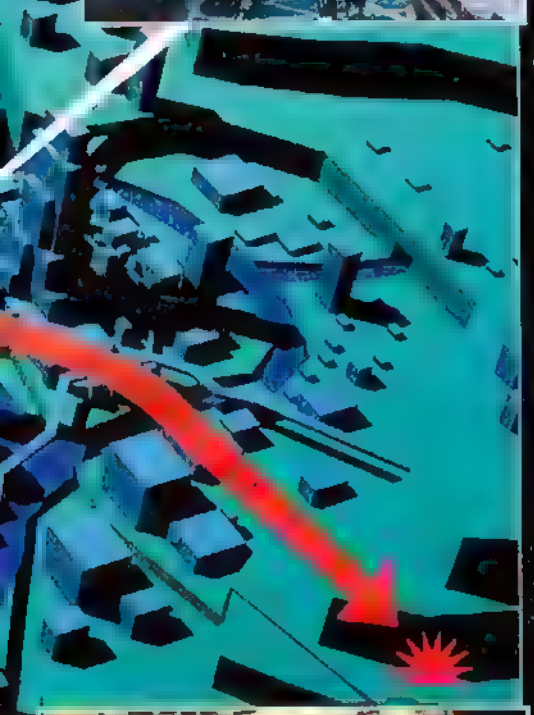

RED FACTION II
COMMONWEALTH COUP
The Red Faction is using their entire arsenal in the latest attempt to
FROM THE AIR
The Red Faction customized Assir is a maneuverable air assault vehicle equipped with optical zoom which allows for precise hits on enemy targets.
Assir Fighter 2.0
Drop Point 5:37am
Troops assemble at the Sopot Harbor.
SOPOT CITY
CIVILIAN UPRISING
After Sopot's forces withdrew from the main city, several Red Faction rebels raided Harbor Island and desecrated the symbolic statue of the dictator.
RED FACTION II
MATURE
M
Blood and Gore
Violence
For more up-to-the-minute coverage of the conflict, go to www.redfaction2.com

BREAKDOWN

D'ETAT

overthrow the Dictator Sopot.

Public Information Building *6:05am*
Commonwealth Elite Guards attempt to fend off the attacking Faction soldiers.



The Slums *6:22am*
Rebel soldiers continue to fight despite rumors of growing animosity between Faction leaders.

PC CD ROM

volition

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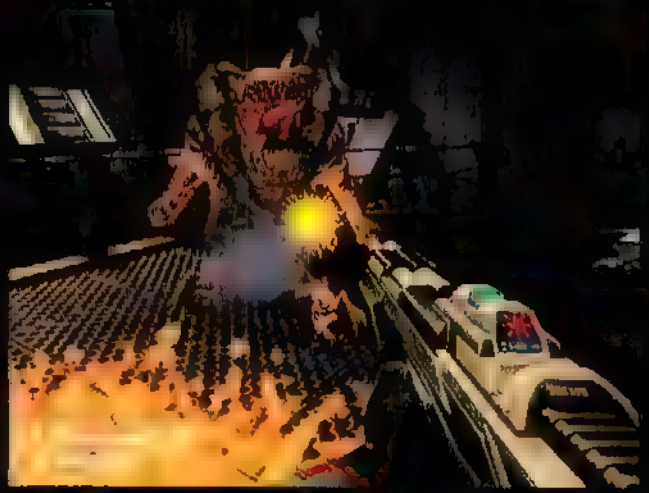
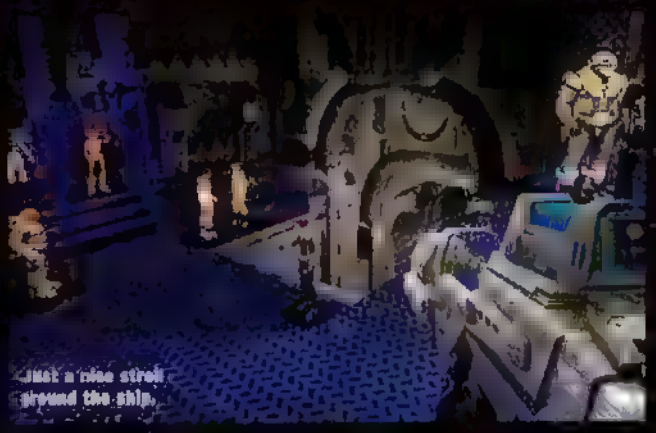


STAR TREK: ELI

Love and guns in the *Star Trek* universe By George Jones



Just a nice stroll around the ship.

Chuck out the alien hardware.

Elite Force II's plot is massive—at least three times as big as the original.

The six-year run of *Star Trek: Voyager* may be over, but the Elite Forces unit is far from done with work. Trumping the original *Star Trek: Elite Force*, the sequel picks up where the show left off. And, Trekkie or not, there's an epic story in the making that'll make you want to sign on for the new mission.

The setup is this: After destroying a Borg sphere—an event that occurs at the end of the *Star Trek: Voyager* television series and serves as your first mission in *Elite Force II*—your crew gets unwillingly reassigned to desk jobs by an annoying Star Fleet bureaucrat. Thankfully, Captain Picard (voiced by Patrick Stewart) intervenes, reassembles your crew, and whisks you off on a surprisingly atypical series of missions that involve *Alien*-style creatures and two races new to the *Star Trek* universe: the Attrexians and the Idryll.

The Attrexians are a gnomish society centered on mining and construction. The Idryll, an elfish-looking race long oppressed by the Attrexians, are much more sophisticated—and mystical. The conflict between these two races, as well as the origin and nature of the alien menace, is central to the game's main story line.

PLAY LONG AND PROSPER

Elite Force II's plot is massive (at least three times as big as the original, which should please fans unhappy with the first game's short length) and spans more than 10 different locales, which range from trippy bio-sci-fi factories to arctic Romulan outposts. This large number of worlds and settings promises to keep gamers interested, especially given the amount of play variance Ritual and Activision are striving to achieve.

The bigger a game gets, however, the more important play balancing becomes. Somewhere between alpha and beta stages right now, Ritual is trying to strike that balance between action, door hacking, and puzzle solving. In the alpha build we saw, producer Doug Pearson explained that the designers are devoting themselves to ensuring that players don't get lost or bombarded with momentum-killing puzzles. "Something we have to admit was everywhere in the early version we played." Our gut feeling says that by the time it's released, Activision and Ritual will have figured out the proper balance and removed many of the door-oriented mental challenges.

Elite Force II's strong point is that it's geared to keep players off balance and moving forward. Ritual is trying to keep them constantly engaged in the plot and story through a variety of techniques: timed levels, minigames, conversations with long-term consequences, entertaining side conversations, and a slew of cool new weapons, including the mystical staff and the radiation gun, which sports a secondary fire that resembles a nuclear blast.

FELL IN LOVE WITH A TREKKIE

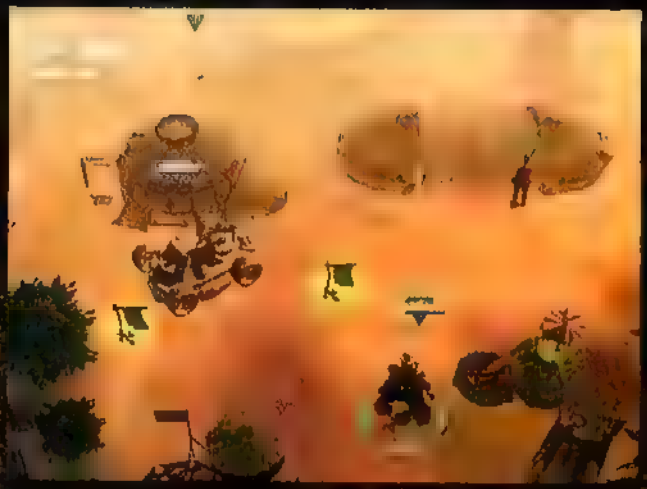
But what good is a *Star Trek* adventure without a little onboard romance? Early in *Elite Force II*, you meet an engineer named Katarina Scott on a derelict ship. She's the granddaughter of Scotty, the Enterprise's engineer from the original television series, and she explains to players that she was able to keep a portion of the crew alive in the ship's transporter amidst failing life-support systems by utilizing a technique that her thick-brogued grandfather actually developed on the original series.

Aside from sounding cool, this homage makes it crystal clear that Activision and Ritual truly get *Star Trek*. And it's not just the history, they also understand the series' continuity, science fiction, sense of adventure, and embrace of human behavior and emotion. As the story develops, you'll even find yourself caught in a bit of a love triangle where your choices will affect the game's ending. And no, we're not saying who's involved. You'll just have to wait until *Star Trek: Elite Force II* pulls out of warp this May.

TE FORCE II

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER RITUAL
GENRE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
RELEASE MAY 2003



SAVAGE

Hey, you got your RTS in my FPS! By Darren Gladstone

It requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win.

Control freaks, action junkies, there's a game for both of you. *Savage* delivers a first-person-shooter beat down and a real-time strategy campaign at the same time—it all depends on how you want to play.

S2 Games is billing this multiplayer online game as a real-time strategy shooter. What the hell does that mean? It means you've got a choice up front beyond just picking sides. Up to 64 people can join a match to gun for each other, earn gold and experience, and blow away enemies, while two commanders direct grunts in the field.

Imagine the multiplayer action of *Battlefield 1942* (and a bit of *EverQuest*) mixed with a real-time strategy game. That's this relatively unknown title's biggest drawing point. From the get-go, you either control the action in a typical RTS god's-eye-view fashion or carry out orders in first-person mode. Those with a good memory will recall seeing a similar blending of genres in Microsoft's space game, *Allegiance*. But this new slant puts you firmly on the ground and requires strategy and action gamers to work together in order to win. If a commander is pleased, he can allot extra money to a player, and when a player scores a kill, some gold goes to his commander.

STRATEGIZE OR TERRORIZE

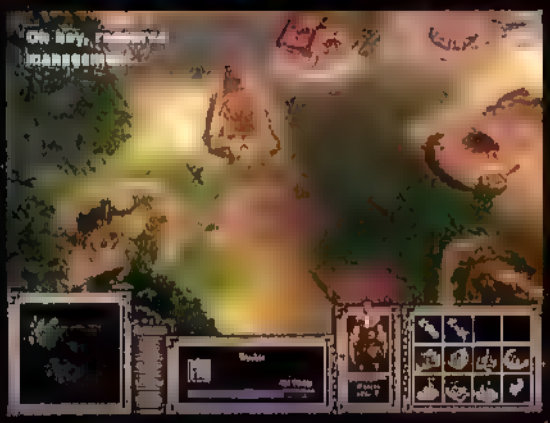
When playing *Savage* as a real-time strategy game, you control the resource management and technological development of your tribe. In typical RTS fashion, you earn money by harvesting ore and resources as you develop your base with factories and watchtowers. There are workers to direct, ancient technologies to research, and troops to command by setting waypoints on the map and telling your troops (both players and NPC worker drones) where to work or focus an attack.

In first-person mode, you're the grunt getting your hands dirty—kill this bad guy, attack that structure, gather these resources. The guy in charge of tribe development better be good at running the show. His successful planning means more technologies with which to arm yourself and more money to buy your combat supplies. And if you're good, follow orders, and stay alive long enough, you'll earn experience. Kill random animals or enemies populating the maps, and you'll be able to more efficiently cut through the competition and earn gold.

MAN OR BEAST

Savage is based in a far-flung fantasy world. Mankind has been blown back to the Stone Age and is rediscovering old technologies. Pick your side: human or beast. The human tribes strip the land of natural resources for their technology, which is based on magnetism, electricity, and chemical research. They have weapons ranging from axes and crossbows to rocket launchers and demolition packs. The beasts, on the other hand, rely on magic and the elements to fight the good fight.

Jesse Hayes, lead designer and COO at S2 Games, promises that network code will be optimized to support 64-player matches. In our office tests, we couldn't get the game to crash once. And though at the moment there is no plan for a single-player campaign or bots to be able to join your matches, Hayes assures us that the game is very customizable: "With a couple changes to the config file, you can create a whole new experience." Hayes used some conventional arms and military skins to create his own wargame. While *Savage* will be locked down at first, there are plans to open up the engine for the mods. They are working on a campaign creator, but Hayes says, "It's with the support of the modding community that we'll be a success." With this unique approach, it could be a hit when it ships in May.



GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: IGAMES

DEVELOPER: S2 GAMES

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY SHOOTER

RELEASE DATE: MAY 2003

This time around, you get to fly the ME-262.

Fly over the new mountainous multiplayer maps.

You can man multiple stations in bombers.

IL-2 STURMOVIK FORGOTTEN BA

Go plane crazy in this action-packed sim By Denny Atkin

: THE TTLES

A couple of years ago, only the most hardcore aviation buffs knew what an IL-2 Sturmovik even was. Ubi Soft's eponymous sim changed all that. The Russian-developed sleeper hit took the market by blitzkrieg-storm, with its excellent flight models, spectacular graphics, and the inclusion of nearly 60 aircraft.

But even with all the bells and whistles, *IL-2* wasn't the perfect sim. *Forgotten Battles* looks to remedy that by taking the number of aircraft to a whopping 113 and adding a dynamic campaign, multistation flyable bombers, new combat theaters, and a host of other improvements.

STURMOVIK UND DRANG

Originally planned as an add-on for the original game, *Forgotten Battles* is now being released as a standalone product, containing all the original's features and a number of enhancements. With improvements extending far beyond the new campaign, you won't feel ripped off.

One of the most significant changes is one of the least publicized: improved A.I. In *IL-2*, you could watch "air combat of the insane," with computer-controlled pilots in crippled planes flying back into combat or circling flak-laden enemy airfields to their doom. Behavior is much more realistic now, with crippled aircraft turning for home, and healthy pilots even more skilled in their attacks.

Forgotten Battles includes a whole new set of scripted missions, as well as the original game's superb mission editor. Once you've played through those, dynamic campaigns await. Yes, plural campaigns. You'll find the expected Russian campaign, as well as the sinister Luftwaffe option. But you probably weren't expecting the chance to relive a Hungarian fighter ace's career or to defend Finland against Soviet (and later, Nazi) aggression in a Brewster B-239 Buffalo!

Campaign missions are randomly generated based on the current war front. Your influence on the war is handled fairly realistically. You won't change the outcome, but successes or failures will affect supply lines, available aircraft, and other factors, appropriately accelerating victory or defeat.

Micromanagement fans will be giddy about the detailed airplane controls available: precise trim, propeller pitch control, mixture setting, manual supercharger control, and more—all individually adjustable for each engine. Almost all of these can be left on auto, thankfully, for less intense players.

COMBAT ROCK

Where the original featured tons of aircraft never seen in a flight sim before, *Forgotten Battles* features an amazing 119 aircraft, of which at least 80 will be flyable. There's plenty of variety with American iron (P-40s, P-47s, and Al P-51Ds), Nazi technology (He-111), and nerve-wracking Russian bombing runs (TB-3). The most interesting addition, though, is multicrewed bombers. Whatever your choice, chances are good you'll need to test the new engine fire extinguishers.

Almost no aspect of the sim has gone untouched. Graphics are spruced up, with more detailed aircraft textures, spectacular new pixel-shaded water, and updated aircraft models. Five new gameplay maps include winter and summer versions of Hungary and Finland. A mountainous map for online combat makes for some breathtaking dogfights up and down the cliffs. The already impressive flight models have been tweaked; planes are now much harder to fly when damaged. Barrage balloons surround some cities, searchlights scan the night sky, and flak will home in if a light locks on your plane.

Despite its historical accuracy and slavish attention to detail, *Forgotten Battles* should be accessible even to first-time sim pilots thanks to the Quick Combat mode that lets you start in the air, point the plane at the bad guy, and start shooting. Hopefully, combat will start before the snow melts in Moscow.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT

DEVELOPER: 1C:MADDOX GAMES

WEB: WWW.PLIONT

SIMULATION

RELEASE DATE: Q2 2003

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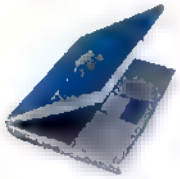

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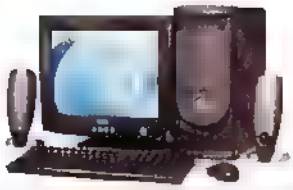

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Command & Conquer:
GENE

RALS

Vintage C&C–for better and worse

BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: EA PACIFIC
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: TEEN, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99 REVIEWED
PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM, 1.8GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS:
PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

In the days when "Ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-so" was considered a tasteful joke and *Rambo* movies were considered educational explorations of Asian culture, *Command & Conquer: Generals* would have been hailed as a keen and timely portrayal of current events with revolutionary gameplay and matchless graphics. Unfortunately for *Generals*, those days have gone the way of Strom Thurmond. Despite a spectacular-looking engine, intriguing units, and some original gameplay, *Generals* doesn't capitalize on opportunities to be a shining light in the genre, and instead ends up as just decent.

Reporting for duty

The most captivating feature of *Generals* is the variety of units. Unlike many other RTS games, which slap different skins on similar units, the three warring sides are unique and well balanced, each with its share of strengths and weaknesses. The Chinese, for example, are slow, weak, and mediocre at the start. They have good defensive weaponry, however, and if they have time to build up their tech tree, they gain access to devastating nuclear weapons and the nearly unstoppable overlord tank. The United States possesses fast and deadly forces. Their air force easily dominates the skies, and their ground units are matchless. This technology comes at a price, though; the U.S. requires large sums of money in order to field an effective force. It also has less versatile defensive structures and is susceptible to surprise attacks. Even the motley GLA has advantages. Though its units are weak, they're cheap and stealthy, and its bio-weapons clear out enemy fortifications with ease. Its buildings are also more resilient than the others.

The "generals" portion of the game is an interesting addition. As you kill enemy units, your alter ego in the game earns experience to buy special abilities like A-10 strikes, bio-weapon bombs, and EMP strikes. These add more tactical considerations to the game but are hardly revolutionary for a genre that has been moving towards a more RPG feel for a while.

There are a couple of other steps forward in game mechanics. Resource management is easier than most other RTS games, since you only need to collect generic supplies instead of three or four different resources. There are now capturable buildings, including houses for fortifications and oil derricks that provide resources. Air combat is handled quite well and is an integral (and more manageable) part of any combined-arms battle.

As always with C&C games, multiplayer is the highlight of *Generals*. With the variety of units and myriad possible strategies, the multiplayer remains fresh even after repeated play. *Generals* supports maps for up to eight players, random side selections, and team play. Sadly, the only game mode included is a deathmatch-style slugfest.

Can't get out of boot camp

A cliché of the gaming industry is that there is nothing new in the RTS genre. Since they're continuing the legacy of the franchise that popularized the genre, *Generals*' creators seem to revel in their pedigree. They make no effort to modernize the genre or even adopt many of conventions used by everyone else. The end result is a game that plays older than it looks.

The single-player campaign is short, comprising only 21 missions with around 15 hours of play. Objectives rarely take full advantage of the unit selection. Nearly all the U.S. and Chinese missions are against the GLA, and they usually involve building up a decisive force while beating off enemy raids. The GLA campaign attempts to be more imaginative by having unorthodox objectives—usually against civilian targets. However, they're repetitive, with goals like racing against civilians to salvage supply crates, or destroying dozens of civilian buildings to collect a bounty.

The problems are exacerbated by a cartoonish and mildly disturbing presentation. One wonders if *Generals* developers had their tongues permanently stuck in their cheeks during development. They had no qualms about using current events for inspiration in creating their game world. Instead of the cult-like Brotherhood of Nod, there is a world-spanning, turban-wearing, AK-toting terrorist organization built upon the anger of the disenfranchised peoples. Calling themselves the Global Liberation Army, they seek to "liberate" the subject peoples of the world from their oppressors—namely the U.S. and China. They will use any means necessary in their struggle, including bio weapons and terror tactics against civilians. Cultural sensitivity here extends only as far as refraining from the mention of religion. But you don't need a cultural anthropologist to tell you who these guys are based on, since every GLA building looks like a miniature Mosque.

The "near-future" Chinese force that opposes them brandishes cheesy sport-red stars, red banners, and troops with '60s-era uniforms. There are even big

American warships head to [illegible]

[illegible] last-ditch GLA effort, the [illegible]

An American particle beam blasts through a Chinese factory like a hot knife through butter.

gongs at the Chinese bases—perhaps to call the troops in for a lunch of chop suey? The voice acting is suitably atrocious, with actors speaking in fresh-off-the-boat accents that would have made Fu Manchu cringe.

With the only "normal"-sounding faction being the gung-ho Americans, *Generals* gives one the distinct feeling of watching a "Big American Kicks Ass" movie from the Reagan era. Though none of these factors are truly offensive, they are dated and unfortunate.

The interface also feels antiquated. Rather than using right-clicks to move troops and left-click to select them, *Generals* continues to use the left-click interface created for *Dune II*. You use the same button to select and order troops, and the right button has been relegated to simply unselecting troops. It's clunky and difficult to get used to, since every other RTS uses the right-click interface, and the game doesn't allow you to remap anything.

Other anachronisms are a problem. You can't set rally points on the minimap, and issuing guard and attack move orders on the minimap yields different results than on the main screen. Despite being 3D, *Generals* doesn't take advantage of the technology much. Rotating the camera is done with the number pad, an awkward procedure for right-handed folks. You can get close and enjoy the unit details, but even at the highest zoom level, you'll barely see more than a couple dozen units at once.

Battles are vintage C&C—overly micromanaged affairs that quickly devolve into chaotic melees between mobs. There are no formations, no easy way to select particular unit types from a group, and little unit A.I. Unless attacked within their own weapon range, they won't defend themselves. Would an A.I. that shoots back be too much to ask for? The poor A.I. is evident in skirmishes against the computer as well. Even at the hardest level, it isn't very good. With a strong defensive setup, you can take a nap while the game runs, without any ill effect. The standard computer tactic is to build small forces and launch incessant raids incapable of doing real damage.

THE END RESULT IS A GAME THAT PLAYS OLDER THAN IT LOOKS.

Time to demote this general

Generals ultimately looks better than it plays. Despite its faults, there'll no doubt be plenty of C&C diehards who won't mind the primitive control scheme and gameplay. With dozens of maps and a full-featured scenario editor, these fans will find endless hours of enjoyment in the multiplayer experience that's been the hallmark of the series. For everybody else, there's nothing new to see here and no reason to sit through the anachronisms.

VERDICT ★★★★★

It's vintage C&C with some updated graphics.

CASE OF THE MISSING SCENARIO

Recently, a press release from EA announced that *Generals* had gone gold and that "players can annihilate the opposition in the 22-mission single-player campaign." If you actually play the game, you'll find only 21 missions. Have the EA folks forgotten how to count?

Turns out it was a case of conscience rather than bad arithmetic. Originally, *Generals* had seven missions each for the American and Chinese campaigns, and eight for the GLA. When the gold was submitted to the European publishers however, one of the GLA missions was deemed inappropriate and nixed.

The missing mission was a tedious and tasteless affair involving the murder of civilians. With a fleet of anthrax trucks, your goal was to kill 300 civilian units in a Chinese-occupied city.

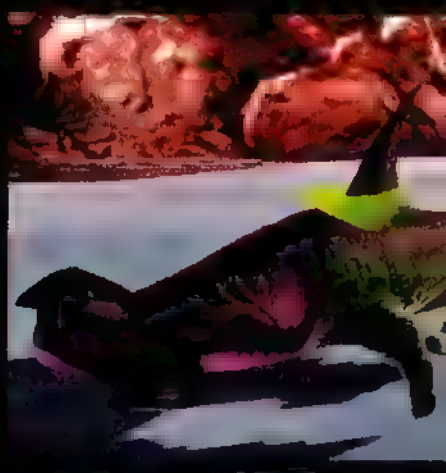
The removal was a small victory for good taste, but does it really matter when your ultimate goal as the GLA is to spread anthrax on a global scale?

YOU'RE IN THE MIDST OF A
PIRANHA TIGERS HAVE YOU

Sambito: It looks a little ridiculous, but pound for pound, the best aquatic fighter is definitely the Sharkantis...

That's right. Take a shark and breed it with a praying mantis.

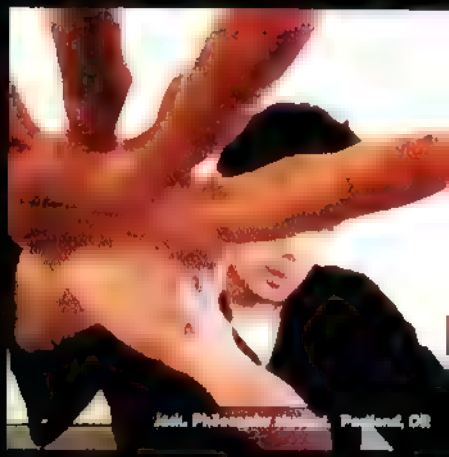
Trust me. This thing will knock you out and bite your ear off.



Jack B. Quick: Shark Shark Shark.

If I hear another shark combo, I'll puke. When it comes to fighting in the water, the word "attrition" comes to mind. It's a numbers game.

I like to load up on piranhas and put them with a fast predatory feline. When you got an army of Piranha Tigers, you'll be King Neptune faster than you can say "Mermaid Sandwich." Get my drift??? :-)



TEEN T
Violence
Comic Mischief
Microsoft game studios
relic

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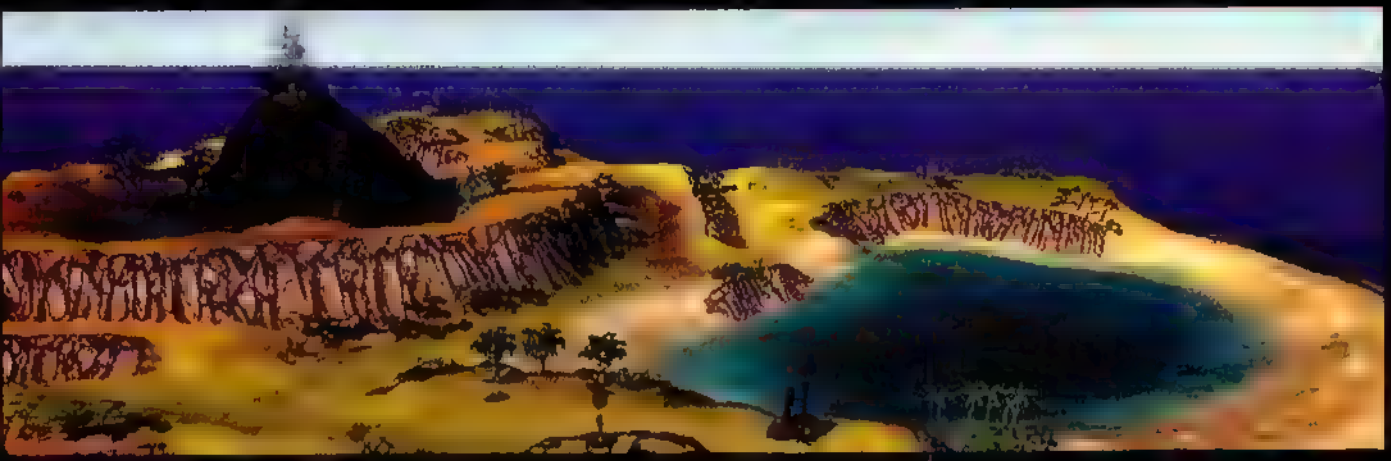
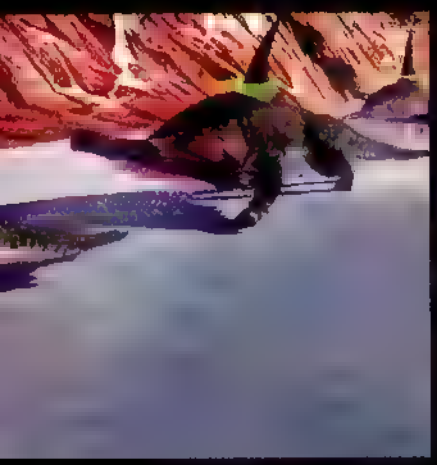
MASSIVE SEA BATTLE, AND SURROUNDED. NOW WHAT?

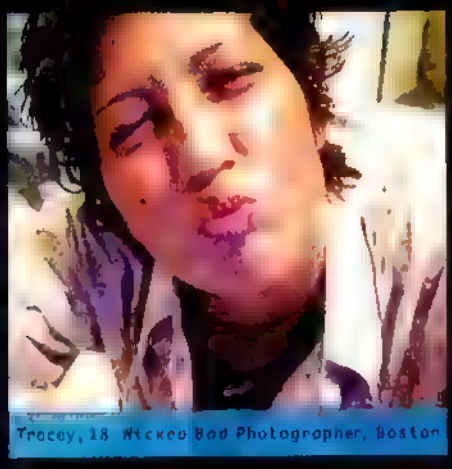




Traceydoll: Ok sharks are good, but why mess with bugs when you can take something vicious and mix it with straight-up nastiness. Give me a hammerhead shark and a crocodile and I'll show you a mean machine.

In a 30 min. fight to the death, it's sink, swim or be devoured.

Looks like Jack B. Quick may be in for a nice and slow death. You hear me, Jack? You got nothing!



Welcome to Impossible Creatures, the next real-time strategy game from the makers of Homeworld. Get ready for a world where you create completely whacked-out mutant animals and then unleash them on your enemies. Fast-paced RTS action and dynamic 3D environments combined with over 40,000 possible animal creations equal combat like you've never seen. And with intense online multiplayer action, your opponents are as limitless as the creatures you create.

For more real time strategy, visit www.microsoft.com/games/impossiblecreatures

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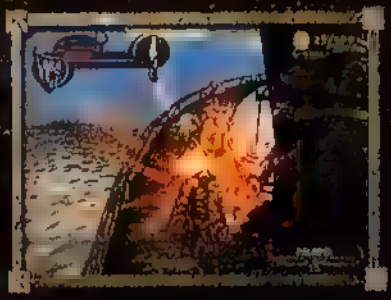
THE BATTLE LINE BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARK HAS BEEN CAST.

NEW, CRUCIAL CHECK POINTS FOR SURVIVAL.

PLAY AS LIGHT OR DARK FROM THE BEGINNING.



BATTLE AS 12 PLAYABLE WIZARDS AND WARRIORS.

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD'S

2002 GAMES OF THE YEAR

We hate to gloat. Well, OK, no we don't. We love to gloat. And as we reflect back on the past year, we have a lot to gloat about. Because, despite the droning pontifications of so-called "experts," along with the usual annoying blather of Internet whiners and smug console fanboys, PC gaming not only failed to die in 2002, it actually had one of its strongest years in memory. In fact, you really have to go all the way back to 1997 (*Half-Life*, *Grim Fandango*, *StarCraft*) to find a year so overloaded with great PC games. In a way, it was too much. Even though we get to do this for a living, we still didn't have enough time to finish every game we wanted to finish. Heck, some of us are still trying to complete *Medal of Honor*—released way back in January. So, we can't imagine how you folks with real jobs coped with it all (we suspect pharmaceuticals). As a result, this year's awards decisions were tougher than ever for us, and the list of great games that didn't win anything here pains us more than it does you. All we can say is this: Buy them all. They're all great.

Now, sit back, relax, and get ready as the *CGW* editors don their best Cheeto stained tuxedos and proudly hand out the 2002 Game of the Year awards!

GAME OF THE YEAR

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR GAMES** DEVELOPER **ROCKSTAR GAMES NORTH**

NOMINEES

BATTLEFIELD 1942

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

FREEDOM FORCE

READER'S CHOICE

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

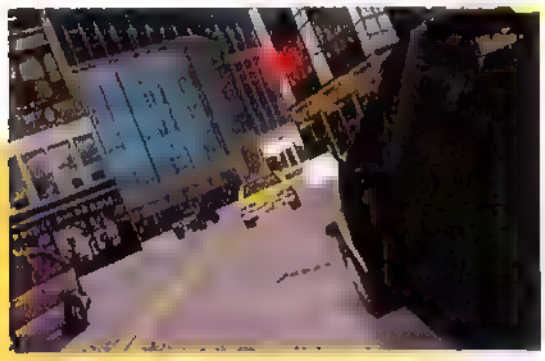
Is *Grand Theft Auto III* an example of sociopathic desensitization or brilliant game design? While the mainstream media likes to harp about the former, we prefer heralding *GTA3* for the latter. Rockstar Games North took a humble little franchise and overhauled it into an amazing game for the third go-round.

GTA3 proves two things: It's entirely possible to make a great combination of linear storytelling and open-ended gameplay, and such games can sell millions. Oftentimes, games lean too much in one of these directions; either the game strings you along a clichéd and linear story line, or it gives you so much freedom, there's actually nothing to focus on. *GTA3* provides the perfect combination of the two: a finite, linear narrative that rewards players for progressing through it, yet the freedom to do whatever the heck they want in the meantime. If you don't quite feel like tracking down and neutralizing an informant for a rival drug cartel, you can just cruise around the city looking for trouble—or for more opportunities to make cash and get a better set of wheels. Players also have tremendous freedom in how they complete a mission; the *CGW* staff constantly discusses different approaches to similar missions, with some editors favoring car bombs while others choose sniper rifles. One simply uses a really big bus as an assassination tool.

GTA3 PROVES TWO THINGS: IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO MAKE A GREAT COMBINATION OF LINEAR STORYTELLING AND OPEN-ENDED GAMEPLAY, AND SUCH GAMES CAN SELL MILLIONS.

The closest competitor to *GTA3*'s design this year is *Morrowind*, of all things, which provides flexibility within the confines of a linear, overarching story. However, *GTA3* essentially improves upon our previous Game of the Year winner, *Operation Flashpoint*. While that game has a great open-ended design, our one reservation about awarding it Game of the Year honors was how insanely hardcore and niche-y it is. *Operation Flashpoint* is a great game, but it's also intimidating in appearance and difficulty, and demanding when it comes to players' skills. *GTA3* provides the same genius design, but in a much more accessible wrapper for both newbies and hardcore players alike to appreciate.

It is also one of the few major games in which the player is the central villain. Spin it how you will, but not many other games allow you to cheat, steal, betray, lie, murder, and solicit



prostitutes (yet, players can offset the frank criminality by doing goodwill missions like being a firefighter or an ambulance driver, or even a vigilante cop). As a result, most people joined the bandwagon in denouncing this as a morally corrupt game featuring violence and pornography, but playing the game is no different than watching *Goodfellas* or *The Sopranos* or *Scarface* (from which Rockstar licensed the soundtrack for one of the game's radio stations). Frankly, we applaud a game that is willing to dive into such morally ambiguous territory rather than sticking with some cookie-cutter "you're a cop on the edge and out to get the baddies!" type of scenario.

There was also the concern that we're giving an award to a game that's a port of a PS2 game. First off, the franchise debuted on the PC in 1998. Additionally, the game doesn't feel like a port. It doesn't stupidly tell you to use the Triangle and Circle buttons, the mouse-and-keyboard interface is actually much better than the PS2's control pad, and the addition of an internal MP3 player makes *GTA3* a natural PC fit.

Numerous little touches simply round out the rest of the game. The radio scripting is sharp, and while the graphics aren't as amazing as, say, those in *Unreal Tournament 2003*, they still look damn fine and stay playable despite generating all the buildings, vehicles, and people in your way. The high production values allow for voice talent like Joe Pantoliano, Michael Madsen, Debi Mazar, and Robert Loggia, who all help to generate the atmosphere of a genuine mob movie.

While *GTA3* wasn't a unanimous winner, it still obtained the clear majority of votes from our staff. Other noteworthy games nominated for overall Game of the Year are *Freedom Force*, *Medal of Honor*, and *Battlefield 1942*. *Freedom Force* is a font of creativity and joy, but as much as we love the game, the design and style of *GTA3* overcame it. *Medal of Honor* is the best shooter we've played in years, but *GTA3* proves to be the better game overall, and while *Battlefield 1942* is also a blast to play, again, we give the nod to *GTA3* for its implementation of vehicular mayhem and mission design. Besides, *GTA3* has the one thing *Battlefield 1942* lacks: a flying tank.

Grand Theft Auto III is a brilliant game. Exploring such bold and taboo territory and offering a great example of open-ended design make it a worthy award winner, and Rockstar Games North deserves accolades for crafting such a superb game.

PAST WINNERS

2001 Operation Flashpoint (Codem…)
2000 The Sims (EA)
1999 Unreal Tournament (…)
1998 Half-Life (Sierra)
1997 Jedi Knight (LucasArts)
1996 Diablo (Blizzard)
1995 Gabriel Knight 2 (Sierra)
1994 X-COM (Microprose)
1993 Doom (id Software)
1992 Links 286 Pro …
1991 Civilization (Micropr…)
1990 Wing Commander …
1989 Railroad Tycoon (Microprose)
1988 SimCity (Maxis)
1987 Empire (Interste…)
1986 Earl Weaver Baseball …
1985 Ultima IV (Origin)
1984 Kampgruffe (Ssi)

STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

FREEDOM FORCE

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: IRRATIONAL GAMES

NOMINEES

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS II

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

SIMGOLF

WARLORDS BATTLECRY II

READER'S CHOICE

WARCRAFT III

The superhero game curse has been broken. Irrational's game, *Freedom Force*, is the best strategy game this year. Irrational crafted a respectful and loving parody of the Silver Age of comics, complete with the requisite "word ,zzz"-style dialogue, origin stories filled with improbable circumstances, and classic four-color art style of the period. Though it's a game swathed mostly in primary colors and word balloons, *Freedom Force*'s use of a 3D engine ensures it resembles a game from 2002, not 1992. The sheer creativity behind the "comic universe" of this game is worthy of recognition alone.

But what appeal does *Freedom Force* have to the nonsuperhero dorks, the masses that won't stoop to wearing Green Lantern shirts or arguing about who should be cast as Ultimate Nick Fury? What is it about the game that's so good? Well there's a great real time tactical combat engine that melds pausable action with completely destructible environments. Speed freaks can plough through the game without pausing, while tactically minded people can pause, survey the action, and figure out what to do. Don't have time to pull off a ranged attack? Grab the nearest lamppost and swing away. Your opponent's attacking from an elevated position? Destroy the building he's standing on. The RPG subsystem and the large built-in roster allow for lots of replay value—many *CGW* staffers talk about the different heroes and abilities used for particular missions. In fact, reviews editor Robert Coffey replayed the game using all the lame heroes (Eve, Sea Urchin, Mentor, etc.), and realized that they, in fact, don't suck—you just have to develop them like any of our favorite heroes (Microwave Man O War, El Diablo). There's also the ability to create your own heroes and use the Danger Room to set up a quick standalone skirmish. Besides, people who don't find one-liners like "Your evil is unwanted here!" amusing are probably too morose for life itself.

We respect *Medieval: Total War* and its grandeur and flourish in simulating European history, but it doesn't quite grab us the way *Freedom Force* does (though our freelance writers were nigh-unanimous in picking *Medieval* for this category). We admire how *Warlords Battlecry II* is a perfect example of an honest-to-god RPG (role playing strategy), but the RTS conventions—it's still all about managing an economy and amassing a larger force to brute your way to victory—kept it from grabbing the gold. *Europa Universalis II* is far too niche-y even for us. Sid Meier's craft in *SimGolf* is good, but again, *Freedom Force*'s creativity ultimately won us over.

GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE YEAR

Magic: The Gathering Online

Yes, the pricing plan is ludicrous; yes, it's horribly unfriendly to newbies; yes, it's just this side of a pyramid scheme, but dammit—as much as we want to hate it, *Magic* is still one of the most addictive play-every-day games, thanks to a brilliantly designed game underneath its irritating online manifestation. Oh, we wants to hate it, we do, but we loves it, we loves it ...

FUNNIEST GAME

Grand Theft Auto III

Both *No One Lives Forever 2* and *Freedom Force* have loads o' laffs, but we're giving the nod here to *GTA3*, largely because of its hilarious, irreverent radio station parodies—in particular "Chatterbox," which nails talk radio dead on and provides a steady stream of comedy amidst all the killing and looting.

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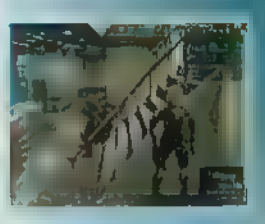

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SNEAKING MODE • SKATEBOARDING MODE • BOMB DISPOSAL MODE •
ELIMINATION MODE • HOLD UP MODE • PHOTOGRAPH MODE •
HIDDEN PLAYABLE CHARACTERS • GIGANTIC SOLDIERS • NEW DOGTAGS •
NEW MUSICAL SCORES • EXCITING NEW STORYLINES

MATURE M — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence
Partial Nudity

PC CD ROM

PlayStation®2

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R P G O F T H E Y E A R

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PUBLISHER **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS** DEVELOPER **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS**

NOMINEES

- NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
- ARX FATALIS
- DUNGEON SIEGE
- ICEWIND DALE II

READER'S CHOICE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Memorable characters. Great graphics. Amazing tools. Fierce combat. Man alive, pretty much every nominee for RPG of the Year in 2002 has most or all of these, making this the best year for elf-huggers since, well, maybe forever.

We were wowed early in the year by *Dungeon Siege*, a *Diablo*-killer with spectacular graphics, real-time party-based gameplay, no level loading, and so many smart tweaks and twiddles that developer Gas Powered Games has practically added five pages of mandatory features to the design document of every action-RPG released in the next 10 years. *Arx Fatalis*...well, no one is going to imitate its tweaks, and it has hands-down the most annoying interface of the year, but fortunately, it also sports sharp graphics (despite its entirely subterranean setting) and a great story that lets players solve the game's challenges in a number of ways. *Icewind Dale II* also lets you solve its more linear story in a number of ways—as long as those ways focus on your party beating the snot of monsters and bad guys in one bruising battle after another. It is the last great game from a fading engine, and we love it. The big new *D&D* engine is in *Neverwinter Nights*, and it gave gamers a fabulous toolset for creating their own adventures—too bad the single-player campaign prompted a staffwide shrugging of shoulders.

But *Morrowind* puts it all together in a great big—almost too big—package. This game is huger than huge, sprawling like an MMORPG, but without all those annoying people. No two gamers experience *Morrowind* in exactly the same way. The intuitive, use-based experience system and 27 character classes (as well as the option to create new classes) assure that your character is wholly yours, and a true reflection of the way you play the game. Just in case, Bethesda Softworks created a game world so packed with rival guilds, political factions, and feuding clans, you can spend scores of hours exploring that portion of the game without ever touching the main story. Or, you can simply wander the gorgeously rendered landscape, freeing slaves, exploring dungeons, meddling in romance, and picking up random quests. And just in case the epic story line, massive environments, pitched battles, and great enchanting and spell-creation systems aren't enough, *Morrowind* shipped with an editor every bit as impressive (though not as user-friendly) as *Neverwinter Nights'*, allowing users to edit every single item and aspect of the game, as well as create their own adventures, structures, character classes, quests, NPCs, pack mules, and more. In a year of big RPGs, none is more ambitious, more accomplished, or more deserving of RPG of the Year than *Morrowind*.

BEST GRAPHICS

Unreal Tournament 2003

In a crowded first-person-shooter world—where good visuals are everything—you've gotta do something really different to impress us. Enter *UT2003*. The weaponry and aliens may look cool, but the backgrounds—cascading skies, and detailed levels almost make us forget about how good the previous *Unreal Tournament* is—almost.

BEST TREND

Open-ended gameplay

One of the holy grails of gaming—letting players "live" in a game world and do whatever world want—is finally coming to glorious fruition. Two games do it masterfully this year: *Morrowind* and *Grand Theft Auto III*. Thanks to their unqualified success (especially *GTA3*), expect much more to come in the years ahead.

ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: 2015

NOMINEES

- JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
- GRAND THEFT AUTO III
- HITMAN 2
- NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

READER'S CHOICE

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

This is the toughest category we faced this year. There are five outstanding titles, and it's hard to find fault with any of them. *Jedi Knight II* is a blast, and the force powers and lightsaber control are perfectly executed. But the pacing is a bit off (everything before getting a lightsaber was "eh"), and we realized that what makes *JK2* so great is also what makes *Jedi Knight* great—which is why that game won Game of the Year in 1997.

No One Lives Forever 2 is among the funniest and most entertaining games of 2002. We love the intelligence and wit, the incredible variety, and the wacky elements like machine-gun toting mimes and bananas as weapons. But the pacing isn't as brisk as the original's, and there are fewer thrills like the skydive gunfight in *NOLF*. Maybe Monolith spoiled us with the first game, and now we just expect too much.

In contrast, *Hitman 2* is a huge improvement over the original, and it's one of the best games of last year in any genre. The game's huge levels are always interesting, and you can play them any number of different ways. The five saves per level adds another challenging element without adding frustration.

But in the final votes, it came down to *GTA3* versus *MOH*, and that's where we deadlocked. Half of us love playing through the beautifully designed *MOH*, despite its linearity. The other half argue that while *MOH* is a superb evolutionary advancement, *GTA3* broke the mold with its wide-open gameplay that lets you play any way you want. Ultimately, it would've been a tie, had *GTA3* not clobbered the field by winning Game of the Year. (In our view, Game of the Year transcends genre boundaries, so there's no point in duplicating the award.)

That doesn't take away at all from the best single-player shooter since *Half-Life*. More than any game we've played, *MOH* makes you feel like an action hero in a WWII movie: storming the beach, manning a machine gun from the back of a jeep, infiltrating enemy installations, taking control of a massive Tiger tank and blasting Panthers and buildings while crushing enemy soldiers under your treads. There are so many great moments—from viewing spectacular scripted events, to disguising yourself as a German officer to infiltrate a submarine base, to calling in air strikes while peering through binoculars—that *MOH* remains the year's best shooter even though it came out in January of 2002. Had it shipped 10 days sooner, it would've been our 2001 Game of the Year.

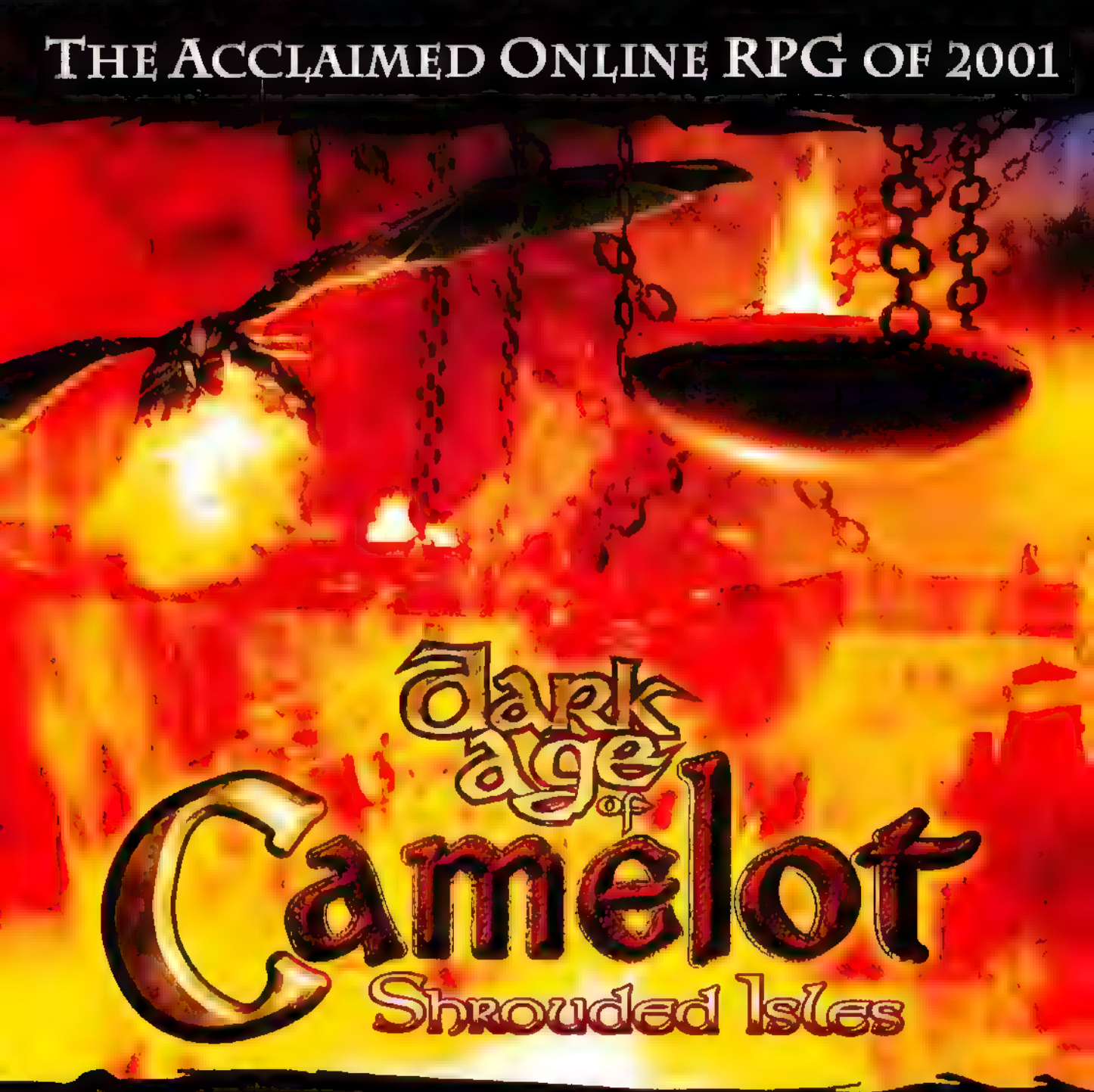
Good job, 2015! Now, give us the sequel!

BEST LEVEL

Omaha Beach in Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

The Omaha Beach level borrows heavily from *Saving Private Ryan*, but that doesn't bother us a bit. Surviving the hail of bullets and mortars, killing the machine gunners, and clearing out the pillboxes is incredibly difficult—and incredibly memorable.

THE ACCLAIMED ONLINE RPG OF 2001



SHROUDED ISLES: THE FIRST EXPANSION PACK FOR DARK AGE OF CAMELOT, THE FASTEST GROWING ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME EVER! THREE NEW ISLAND CONTINENTS, SHROUDED IN MYSTERY, CHAOS AND ADVENTURE ARE YOURS TO EXPLORE. EXPERIENCE IT ALL IN A STATE-OF-THE-ART NEW GRAPHICS ENGINE WHICH BRINGS THE WORLD OF THREE REALMS OF CAMELOT TO YOU IN SHARP, CLEAR, REALISTIC GRAPHICS AND AN AWESOME DISPLAY OF NEW SPECIAL EFFECTS WITH FRAME-RATES FASTER THAN EVER BEFORE!

- STUNNING NEW VISUAL EFFECTS WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART GRAPHICS ENGINE
- EXPLORE THREE NEW ISLAND CONTINENTS - ONE FOR EACH REALM
- DISCOVER THREE NEW PLAYER RACES
- EXPERIENCE TWO NEW CLASSES PER REALM
- EXCITING ALL NEW AMBIENT MUSIC SOUNDTRACK
- FIND NEW MONSTERS, TREASURE, ARMOR, WEAPONS, QUESTS AND MUCH MORE CONTENT
- MULTIPLE SERVER TYPES INCLUDING NEW "ONE WORLD" SERVERS WITH NO PVP AND ALL REALMS AVAILABLE TO ALL PLAYERS AT ALL TIMES!

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MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT

MULTIPLAYER GAME OF THE YEAR

BATTLEFIELD 1942

PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE

NOMINEES

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

AMERICA'S ARMY: OPERATIONS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

READER'S CHOICE

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

War is hell, and so is trying to yank ourselves away from *Battlefield 1942* long enough to finish this story. After countless Deathmatches *Battlefield 1942* survives the onslaughts of other contenders to be named the best multiplayer game of 2003.

Unreal Tournament 2003 has some seriously fast-paced action, while *America's Army* seriously scares us as a not-so-subtle but very good recruiting tool. And *Age of Mythology*? Well, we couldn't pick any game that DI is good at. Seriously though, *BF1942* is a ridiculously addictive online warfare title. Sure, there's a single-player campaign, but the real reason you want to play is the insane 64-player team Deathmatches.

The biggest selling point of *BF1942* isn't the realism either. We saw people leaping out of planes directly into tanks waiting below. We witnessed fighters screaming in from above with snipers on each wing taking out all comers. We then witnessed a newbie exodus of players too intimidated to compete after seeing these kamikaze tactics firsthand.

So, what is it about *BF1942* that makes it too irresistible to put down? It has to be the fast-paced action and elegant simplicity of setting up matches inside a variety of World War II campaigns. Air combat at Guadalcanal, beach landings in Normandy, storming Stalingrad, duking it out with the Desert Fox—the list goes on and on. Despite the realistic scenarios, *BF1942* is the furthest thing from a sim game. In fact, if you've ever played a first-person shooter, you're instantly at home—whether you're running out in the fields, jumping into a tank, flying a plane, piloting a landing craft, manning a turret...you get the idea. Similar to *Tribes*, you quickly decide the role you want to take on in combat. Antitank, assault, scout, medic, engineer—pick an occupation and then man your station.

The only snags so far are finding people who want to play as a proper team as opposed to the every-man-for-himself *Counter-Strike* run-and-gun style. After all, how many people out there really want to volunteer for the tailgunner position in the back of a Stuka? And, while we're at it, how many people do you really think will be ready to serve as medics?

For creating a game that blends the best bits of wartime action with a solid FPS and a wide variety of vehicles, we're standing at attention for this battle-hardened title.

BEST SOUND

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Part of what makes *Medal of Honor* great is its convincing audio: the terrifying cacophony of gunfire on Omaha Beach, the shouts and cries of American and German soldiers, the distinctive "ping" of an M1 clip being ejected—it all makes you feel like you're experiencing more than just a game.

BEST DEVELOPMENT TOOL

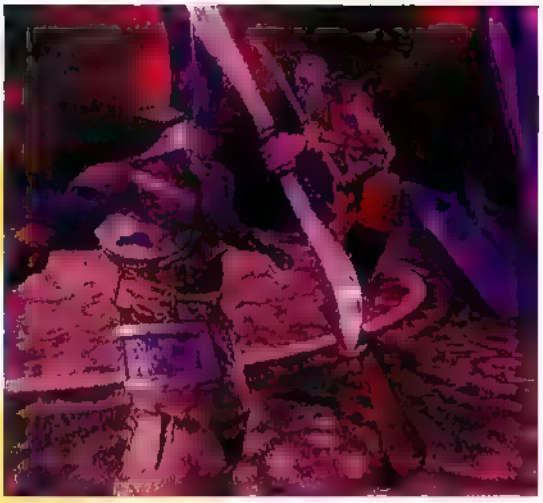
Neverwinter Nights

The last time we had good tools to make RPGs was freakin' *Adventure Construction Kit* in 1984. Bioware has RPG gamers thinking about being RPG designers in the same way people thought about shooter design during the *Doom* and *Quake* days. If *Half-Life*'s tools can beget *Counter-Strike*, who knows what great user RPG will spring from *NWN*?

MMO OF THE YEAR

ASHERON'S CALL 2: FALLEN KINGS

PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIO** DEVELOPER: **TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT**



NOMINEES
EARTH & BEYOND
THE SIMS ONLINE

READER'S CHOICE
THE SIMS ONLINE

Another year of MMORPG hype—and another year of waiting for that breakout hit.

The big guns are still going as strong as ever: *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online*, and the rest have their hardcore devotees who will apparently fork over monthly fees until they drop dead. But none of the MMORPGs released in 2002, despite an avalanche of hype (including a *Newsweek* cover for *The Sims Online*), really hit it out of the park the way some folks (including us) were expecting. *The Sims Online* has its charms, but at this point, it's more a curiosity than a success—though it's also too early to write it off entirely.

Earth & Beyond is another noble experiment—an attempt to take the genre away from the elves and into an outer space sci-fi setting. We had lots of fun with this game, at first, but the more we play, the more we feel like we're just playing *EverQuest* in space—thus betraying the very notion of its originality. Ultimately, it's the most traditional MMORPG, *Asheron's Call 2*, that proves to be the best game in a weak year. Which is not to dismiss its achievements. Actually, *AC2* did an amazing job of fixing or improving virtually everything that was wrong with every other fantasy MMORPG, providing an easy, accessible, stable, and beautiful-looking online game world. The crafting is cool, a real storyline keeps things moving, and the advancement paths provide for lots of variety. Microsoft and Turbine get lots of credit for an incredibly smooth launch and for really working to lose all the annoyances (hello, corpse runs!) that make these games so newbie hostile. We never really took to the original game, but *Asheron's Call 2* is now the fantasy MMORPG to beat. Nice job.

WARGAME OF THE YEAR

COMBAT MISSION: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN

PUBLISHER **BATTLEFRONT.COM** DEVELOPER **BATTLEFRONT.COM**

NOMINEES
AIRBORNE ASSAULT
EAGLES STRIKE
UNCOMMON VALOR

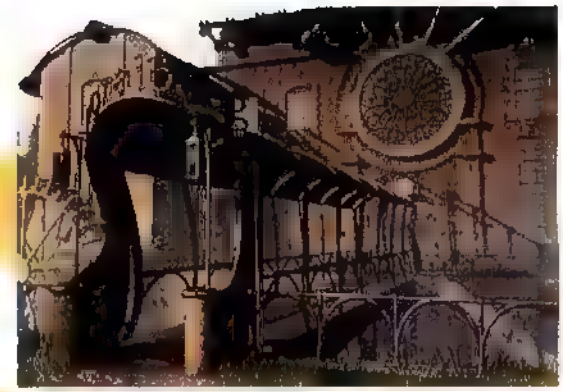
READER'S CHOICE
COMBAT MISSION: BARBAROSSA TO BERLIN

By sea, air, and land, wargamers got a bunch of great games in 2002. Whether it's playing cat-and-mouse with aircraft carriers in the Solomons in *Uncommon Valor* (perhaps the year's best PBEM wargame), launching the world's largest ever airborne operation in *Airborne Assault*, or slogging it out on the ground in France in *Eagles Strike*, wargame developers had some interesting new takes on World War II. But the best new game of all is a familiar face. Battlefront's *Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord* won this award in 2000, and while the sequel—*Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin*—doesn't change the genre the way its predecessor did, it still towers high above the competition. The game system's armor-friendly focus is perfect for Eastern Front combat, and a host of improvements (including an updated graphics engine) ensure the top spot for a series that keeps pushing tactical wargaming to new heights. *CMBB* suffers from the same indifferent A.I. that seems to plague most wargames, but that doesn't prevent it from offering plenty of challenge, and the multiplayer experience is unmatched. Like its predecessor, the game is great at creating memorable moments, and it leaves you recalling your troops' exploits long after you've moved on to more mundane (and less entertaining) endeavors. Whether it's the tide-turning ambush, the seemingly invulnerable lone tank, or the Squad That Wouldn't Quit, *CMBB* makes the game come alive in a way possible only on the computer. That's quite an achievement, and well worth the award of Wargame of the Year.

ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR

SYBERIA

PUBLISHER: **DREAMCATCHER INTERACTIVE** DEVELOPER: **MICROIDS**



Well, whaddya know! An Adventure Game of the Year award! Contrary to the bleating of certain Internet whiners, we here at *CGW* actually do like adventure games–a lot. But with most of the best developers abandoning the genre in the last few years, the pickings are mighty slim. Thank goodness for *Syberia*, an unabashedly old-school point-and-click adventure that very likely would have won this award even in a competitive year. Beautiful original artwork, clever puzzle design, and a transparent interface all support the one thing that always sets the best adventure games apart: a great story. *Syberia*'s odd tale of an American lawyer's spiritual journey as she searches for the eccentric heir to a toy factory ultimately plays out as a poignant meditation on loss, love, and destiny. It's the most emotionally rich adventure game since the great *Sanitarium* and a worthy reminder of how rewarding this struggling genre can be when put in the right hands.

EXPANSION PACK OF THE YEAR

ANARCHY ONLINE: THE NOTUM WARS

NOMINEES

- EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN
- GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER
- OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE
- THE SIMS: UNLEASHED

PUBLISHER: **FUNCOM** DEVELOPER: **FUNCOM**

For a category that generally doesn't stir much debate, the competition for Expansion of the Year was incredibly fierce. Expansions for former Game of the Year winners *The Sims* and *Operation Flashpoint* are as outstanding as their source material. *Shadows of Luclin* introduces horsies, moons, and heinous system requirements to *EverQuest*, while *Island Thunder* finally makes *Ghost Recon* a 5-star game. In the end, the redemption packed into every box of *The Notum Wars* won our votes.

Anarchy Online had one of the worst launches ever, but for the stalwart fans who stuck with it, *Notum Wars* comes through big time, adding a load of new gameplay features (like the land control and attendant rewards that led to sprawling clan wars) and virtually reinventing the game. And if you haven't been playing forever, no problem. *Notum Wars* includes the full (and vastly improved) original *AO*, but with a brand-new, incredibly more newbie friendly front end. All that at one of the lowest price points in PC gaming. The best thing? This is a "booster pack"–just wait until Funcom releases its full-fledged expansion later this year.

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

MADDEN 2003

NOMINEES

- GRAND PRIX 4
- TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003
- US OPEN TOUR 2002

READER'S CHOICE
MADDEN 2003

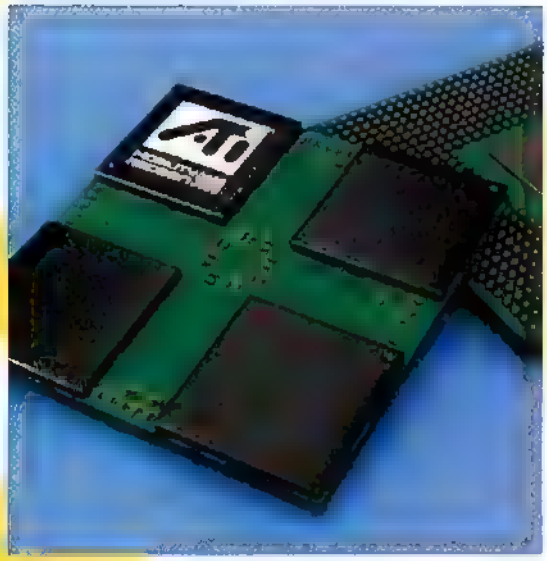
PUBLISHER: **EA** DEVELOPER: **EA SPORTS**

If anyone was inclined to ring the death knell of PC gaming, they'd have to look no further than the pathetic PC sports-gaming arena, where most developers jumped ship to Xbox and PS2. What we have left is EA's lineup and noble attempts like *US Open Tour 2002* (almost, but not quite as good as *Virtua Tennis*) and *Grand Prix 4* (one of the better racing games in years past).

Thankfully, EA has yet to abandon us, and *Madden 2003* is more than simply "the only title in town," it's a great game. Where *Madden 2002* is nothing but a poorly executed port of the PS2 version of *Madden 2001*, the 2003 version is actually a new game that takes advantage of the power of the PC, including Internet play and graphics that blow the PS2 version out of the water. Besides that, the developers smartly integrate some of the best tweaks and balances in the *Madden* franchise thus far. Say goodbye to cheap 80-yard pass plays and hail the return of the king of football.

HARDWARE OF THE YEAR

ATI's Mobility Radeon 9000 & Nvidia's GeForce4 4200 Go



NOMINEES

INTEL 3GHZ PENTIUM 4 WITH HT

DELL INSPIRON 8200

The early frontrunners for 2002's Hardware of the Year award were ATI's and Nvidia's respective top-of-the-line desktop boards. The thing is, we've come to expect faster and more powerful graphics chips. But, until recently, we hadn't come to expect truly gaming-capable laptops. Both ATI's Mobility Radeon 9000 (M9) and Nvidia's GeForce4 4200 Go have at least 64MB of DDR memory and support for DirectX 8.1, and the GeForce even boasts AGP 8x support.

While the Mobility Radeon is currently the mobile graphics chip of choice, it's only a matter of time before Nvidia leapfrogs it. As it stands, a Dell Inspiron 8200 laptop with a 2.2GHz Mobile Pentium 4 processor and the 64MB version of the Mobility Radeon graphics card gets a *3DMark2001SE* score of 7000 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. When the desktop GeForce3 board first came out, that's about what you got on a high-end desktop with a top-of-the-line graphics card! Furthermore, this machine is achieving *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* framerates nearing 100 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off.

So, if you want a laptop but don't want to compromise gaming power, you can thank Nvidia and ATi for making laptop gaming much less of a compromise as it used to be.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR HARDWARE DESIGN AESTHETIC

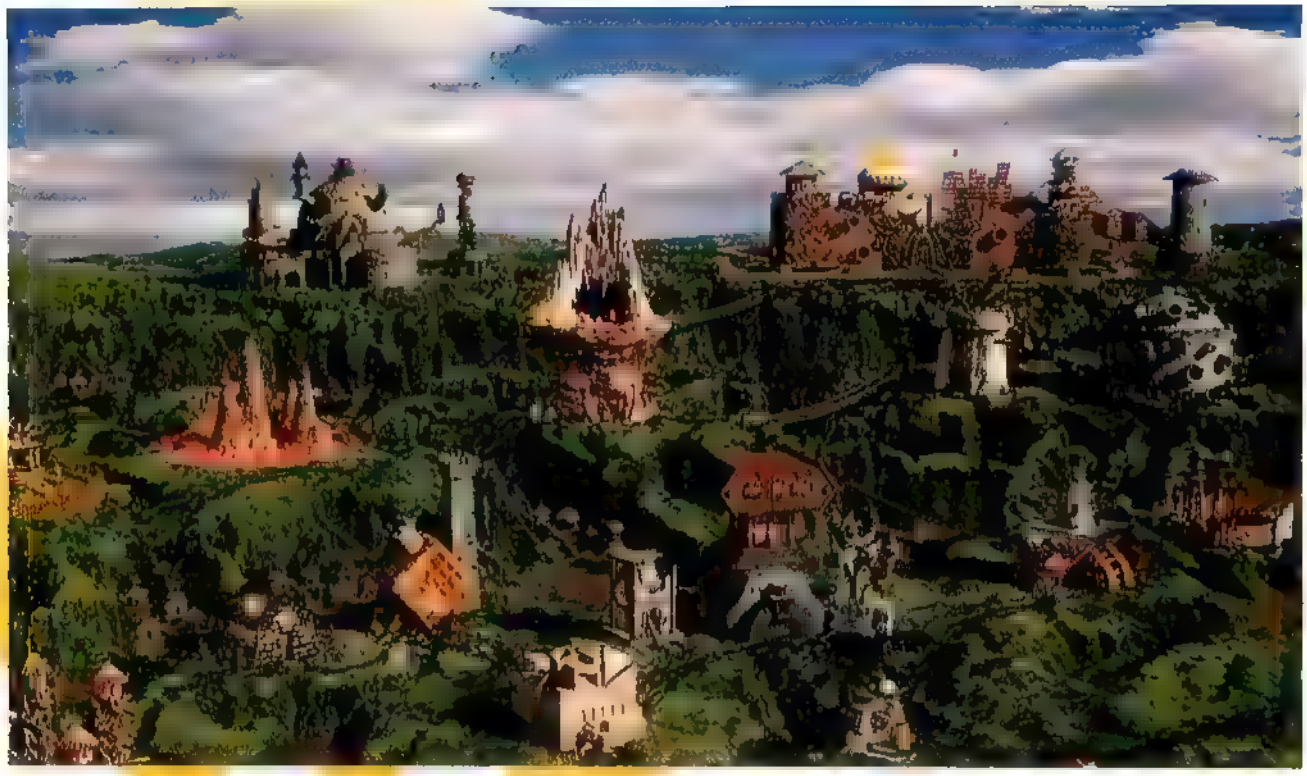
Logitech MX 700 Cordless Mouse

With a price tag of $80, Logitech's MX 700 Cordless Mouse isn't cheap, but with a plethora of customizable buttons and a rechargeable battery, this is a wireless product that's actually worth the added cost. The MX 700 doesn't suffer the latency that plagued earlier cordless mice, and the remote base doubles as a battery charger. While many still prefer to game with Microsoft's Intellimouse Explorer 3.0, the MX 700 deserves kudos for innovation.

BEST HARDWARE THAT DOESN'T MATTER

Logitech Z-680 5.1 speakers

Logitech's Z-680 5.1 speakers are so versatile, CGW's hardware editor got rid of his AV receiver and uses the Z-680s as the centerpiece of his home theater. Spitting out a whopping 500 watts RMS, these babies are THX certified and support both Dolby Digital and DTS. The breakout box has connections for any device you could possibly think of, including coaxial, optical, and direct inputs. In other words, you can hook the Z-680s up to a PC, TV, DVD player, Xbox, PS2, or GameCube. Now, if only more PC games truly supported 5.1 sound



COASTER OF THE YEAR

EVERYTHING MIGHT & MAGIC

PUBLISHER: **3DO** DEVELOPER: **NEW WORLD COMPUTING**

NOMINEES

CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE

There is more than one game this year that makes us feel we were trapped in a giant cocktail shaker full of the muddy blue fluid from ten chemical toilets. Yesiree, 2002 was a banner year for crap. How on earth could we pluck the single plumpest turd from the tangle of soggy tissue? Hard work, gritty determination, and a perverse predilection for wallowing in misery—that's how.

So, ungloved and unvaccinated, we reached in to our elbows and fished out a fetid fistful of filth. First out of the poo-pond *James Bond 007: NightFire*, the most aggressively unplayable game since the unrelenting hammer to the forehead we call *Trespasser*. Electronic Arts greedily gobbled up the superspy license...and, once it was done digesting it, started charging gamers $50 for what was left.

Bad as *NightFire* is, it is but a passing whiff of earthy flatulence on a midsummer breeze compared to the face-straining grunter known as *Civilization III: Play the World*. Frankly, this was the game to beat, a $30 add-on with one single goal: multiplayer—that shipped with one major distinguishing characteristic: nothing resembling playable multiplayer. Compounding matters, *Play the World* savages the 5 star jewel that was *Civilization III* with a brio unmatched by two score of overly caffeinated Manson family members. Et tu, Sid? Et tu?

Beating out *Play the World* would take a Herculean effort and, regrettably, 3DO is more than up to the task. While its dream project, *Army Men of Might & Magic*, languishes in development, 3DO went to the *Might & Magic* cash cow one last fateful time this time squeezing the now-dry *M&M* teat so hard that not blood, but black, gritty bile issued forth, forever spoiling the memories of two of the most beloved *CGW* Hall of Fame franchises. Yes, we know we gave *Heroes of Might & Magic IV* 2½ stars, and we're here to tell you we were wrong...so very, very wrong. This stillborn aberration features broken, unfriendly combat, simultaneously cheating and brain-dead AI, pointless changes to the core hero system; horribly designed campaigns; and...and...and...arrrgghhh! I just want to bite someone! 3DO got Day of Infamy bonus points by releasing *Might & Magic IX* on the same day. God. What can we say about that game? It's been wheezing along for years, but this year's version shipped with a kitchen-size Hefty bag duct-taped over its head. Everything about this once proud series is horrifically mutilated, except its storied length. So, not only is *M&M9* boring, frustrating, infuriating, and a big stinking load of crap—it is boring, frustrating, infuriating, and a big stinking load of crap for a really long time.

In effect, 3DO stuffed everything *Might & Magic* into a pillowcase full of finishing nails before heaving it off a cliff into a pit full of shark teeth. The gooey mess left behind gets the award.

WORST FANS

Farscape

Just because we never watched your favorite show doesn't mean we don't recognize a lame game when we see one. Face it: The game is lame. And your show is cancelled. So, stop mail-bombing us and move on with your lives—those of you who have them.

MORE GAMES WORTH A MENTION

BEST MUSIC ▲
Mafia
Ay, fahgedabowdit! Any game that can instantly summon images of *The Godfather* ("make them an offer they can't refuse") and *The Untouchables* ("just like a w#* to bring a knife to a gunfight.") simply by turning up the volume can't be all bad. This little gem does a great job of capturing the mood of the Roaring '20s.

BEST USE OF A LICENSE
Skittles in Darkened Skye
Darkened Skye proves that if you're collecting supernatural tchotchkes, they may as well be something tasty like Skittles. In fact, the license entertainingly subverts some otherwise crusty fantasy dialogue, such as when a wise old crone intones, 'People knew magic then, and 'twas Skittles what fueled that magic!' The game may be average, but we salute the way it uses Skittles, of all things, so creatively.

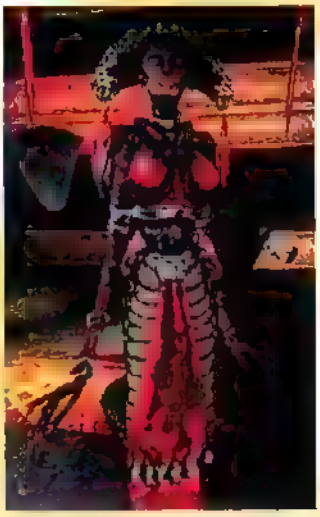
WORST USE OF A LICENSE ▲
James Bond 007: NightFire
A towering ass-terpiece of ineptitude, *NightFire* sloppily emasculates one of the most successful movie franchises with a dull, rusty straight razor. The A.I. is broken, the levels suck, the gadgets are pointless, and the cut-scenes look like especially blurry *Davey and Goliath* rejects. *NightFire* is not so much a game as it is an evil weapon worthy of a Bond villain.

BEST STORY
Freedom Force
Somehow, the writers at Irrational crafted an interesting story that integrates dinosaurs, gods, aliens, and time travel into one sensible whole. Every scrap of writing, from the origin stories to the corny one-liners to the great reveal at the end, is worthy of salute from us.

BEST ART DIRECTION
Freedom Force
Irrational Games' comic-book love is so complete in *Freedom Force*, it bleeds all the way out to the awesome, Silver Age-style install screens. From the primary-color scheme to the word balloons to the cheesy cut-scenes and dialogue, *Freedom Force* is a joyous, reverent comics homage, brilliantly executed by an inspired team of artists.

BEST CINEMATICS
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos
While some are disappointed with *WarCraft III*'s gameplay, no one with eyes and a brain can argue with the virtues of the game's absolutely incredible cut scenes, which feature some of the best CG animation ever. Some day, Blizzard should just go for it and make the movie it's obviously dying to make.

SLEEPER OF THE YEAR ▶
Arx Fatalis
Who would've thought an *Ultima Underworld* wannabe from a French developer wouldn't be a big bag of stink? Certainly not us. Hence our complete surprise when JoWood's *Arx Fatalis* turns out to be one of the best RPGs in a year chockful of 'em. Gorgeous, deep, and challenging, *Arx* is the game you should be playing now that you're done with *Morrowind* and *Neverwinter*.



"GAME OF THE YEAR."

Xbox Game of the Year (IGN, Gamespy)

I ALONE HAVE THE FIFTH FREEDOM.

THE RIGHT TO SPY, STEAL, DESTROY AND ASSASSINATE,
TO ENSURE THAT AMERICAN FREEDOMS ARE PROTECTED.
IF CAPTURED, MY GOVERNMENT WILL DISAVOW
ANY KNOWLEDGE OF MY EXISTENCE.

I AM SAM FISHER.

I AM A SPLINTER CELL.

STEALTH ACTION REDEFINED

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Unreal II: The Awakening

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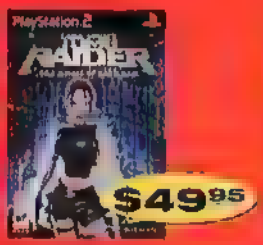

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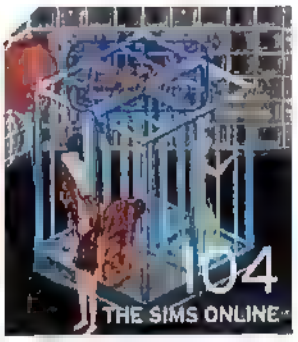
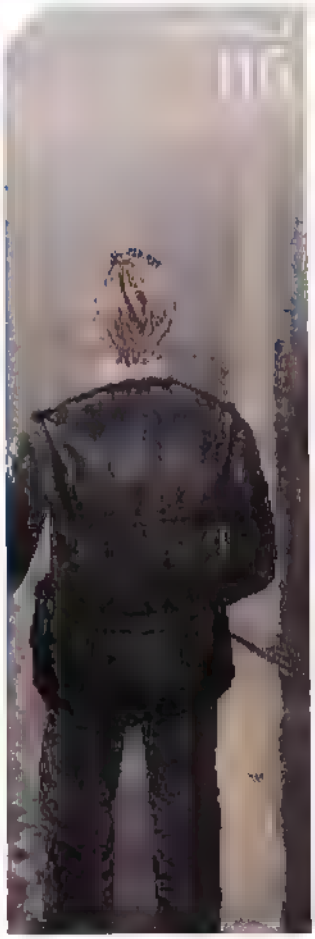
Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



"I want to take the mother-croaker out back, chop off his hindquarters and serve 'em up at a prissy Paris bistro."

FROGGER: THE GREAT QUEST 114



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This planet is a giant, living organism—hence the big teeth-lined maw on the ground. Unfortunately, you spend most of your time on this planet fighting other humans.

Unreal II: The Awakening

Too much of the good things, not enough of the great things

BY ROBERT COFFEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER INFOGRAMES
DEVELOPER LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
ESRB RATING MATURE; BLOOD AND GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE $49.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 733, 256MB RAM, 3GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB GEFORCE2 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4 1.2 GHZ, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

The harsh and not entirely fair way of describing *Unreal II* would be to refer to its subtitle and quip, "*The Awakening* is something you'll need after playing this game." Like I said, harsh and not entirely true, but just true enough that some wag somewhere is bound to say it. *Unreal II* has a lot going for it—things like state-of-the-art graphics, outstanding sound, and some viciously efficient A.I.—but while the game starts off strong, its personality steadily dribbles away, leaving you feeling you've played enough of it and never need to play it again. Compare that to the "I really want to play that level again" feel of games like *Medal of Honor* and *Half Life*—games *Unreal II* obviously wants to emulate—and it's hard not to see the game as something of a letdown.

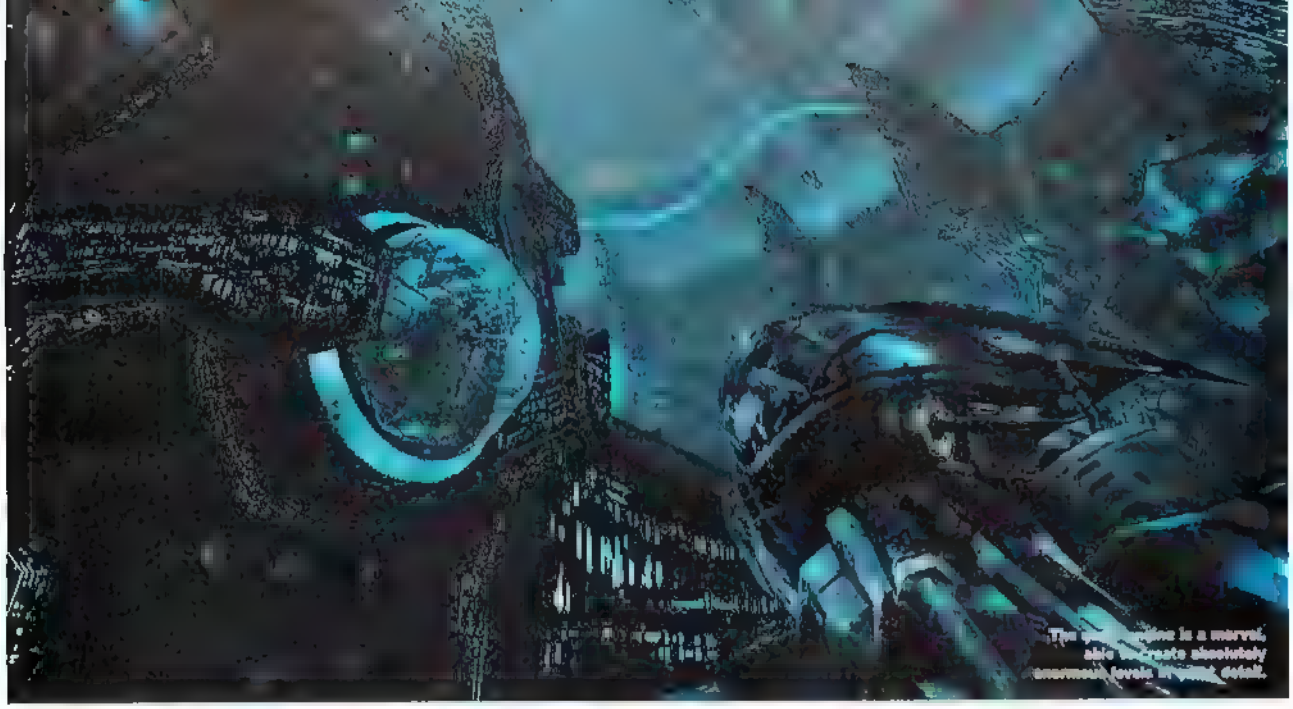
Pretty on the outside

Provided you've got the flame-spitting super turbocharged computer of death that *Unreal II* really needs in order to shine, you cannot help but be wowed by the graphics. Simply put, this resets the bar in terms of what a game can look like, with incredibly rich colors, painstakingly detailed and gorgeously textured models, and some startlingly vivid weapon effects. This is a game engine that will be used for years and years to come.

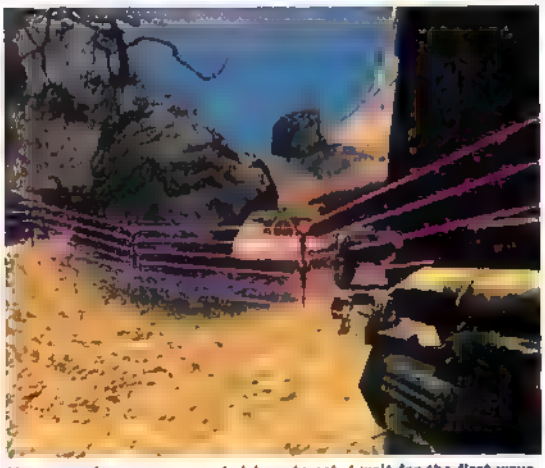
Unfortunately, a lot of that graphical brilliance is wasted on a game that earnestly tries to bring the gameplay up to a similar caliber, but falls aggravatingly short about a third of the way in. At the very beginning, *Unreal II* is up to the job. Haunting sound effects and spare-but effective-use of scripted events create an at times excruciating sense of tension in the first series of missions, as you invest gate a ravaged mining facility. When the hordes of hooting blue space monkey aliens finally start attacking and refuse to let up, the result is a bracing jolt of frenzied action that has you ripping through the levels with the very best sort of murderous glee. And the first appearance of the deadly quick Skaarj is a white-knuckle nightmare.

The game radically shifts gears in the next mission, as you wander a swampy landscape at night, trying to locate a stranded squad of marines. Absolutely nothing happens as you find your way through the murky night, yet the stormy weather and profound sense of isolation ratchet up your unease to the point that, when the inevitable attack finally comes, it's a most a relief.

Yeah, it's pretty, but it's still a jumping puzzle.



Ladies and gentlemen, *Unreal II*'s constitutionally mandated flamethrower.



My energy fence up, my rocket turrets set, I wait for the first wave of enemies to start swarming over the distant hills.

Less is more, more is too much

Not long after that, *Unreal II* starts deflating. The excitement starts to peter out somewhere after the scary giant alien spiders. In place of anything new or exciting, the game just starts piling on more and more stuff. More bad mercenaries in more powerful armor with more rocket launchers. More lengthy boss fights in locked arenas. More corridors, more hordes of enemies in more lopsided battles, and more smacking the reload key after you die more and more, the more you play.

The overdose of stuff is most obvious in the weaponry. *Unreal II* has a great armory with some devastating weapons, including the very first grenade launcher that matters in a single-player shooter. The problem is, it has enough guns for three games (each gun also has an alternate fire), and you just don't need them all, especially since you have what is arguably the most vital and useful gun—the assault rifle—from the very first moments of the game. It's great that there's a shotgun and a magnum and an energy pistol and a shock lance and a flamethrower and a gun that shoots space spiders, but I never, ever had any reason to use them. You won't either. And if you do, you'll be ignoring about five other weapons in order to do it.

Unreal II does have its moments, even during the saggy, routine parts. While fighting waves of other human types isn't that thrilling (and if I really wanted to fight smart humans with rocket launchers, I'd be playing *Unreal Tournament 2003*), a few missions let you order a small squad of fellow space marines into position and set up defensive turrets and energy fields. No one is going to confuse this with *Rainbow Six*, but deploying these guys/things gives these missions a more tactical feel and engages you more.

Late in the game—very late. In fact—*Unreal II* throws a few curves into play and revitalizes the action, giving the hoary "flee the disintegrating spaceship" mission a bit more flavor. It won't knock your socks off, though.

If *Unreal II* could maintain the tension and excitement of the early parts of the game, we'd be looking at a probable five star title. But it doesn't, instead settling for a dazzling new coat of paint on a particularly bruising version of standard shooter gameplay. *Unreal II* is a good, enjoyable game made maddening by tantalizing glimpses of what it could have been.

The excitement starts petering out somewhere after the scary giant alien spiders.

VERDICT ★★★★½

You're going to like this shooter, but you're not going to love it.

The Sims Online

The biggest chat room in the world

BY DANA JONGEWAARD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: MAXIS
GENRE: MMORPG
ESRB RATING: TEEN; COMIC MISCHIEF, MATURE SEXUAL THEMES, MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99; FIRST 90 DAYS FREE, THEN $9.99 MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION REQUIRED
MINIMUM: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB FREE HARD DRIVE SPACE, INTERNET CONNECTION
RECOMMENDED: PENTIUM III 700, BROADBAND INTERNET CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

On the surface, *The Sims Online* is exactly that: *The Sims*, online. Anyone who has played *The Sims* will be instantly familiar with how this world functions, because it looks the same as before. The same eight needs must be monitored, the toolset will be instantly familiar, and similar types of character interactions are available. So, as the biggest-selling computer game ever moves online, is it for better or for worse?

Somewhere in between.

Same game, different verse

New players can create up to three characters in three separate towns (each town is a server capable of housing up to 80,000 characters). Each new character starts out with 10,000 simoleans; additional money must be earned. When you create a character, you have the option to buy your own plot of land and build a house. If you choose to do this, you can invite people to be roommates. The more people living on a property, the larger the house can be. Roommates are allowed to add onto and redecorate the house as they desire, but property owners retain ultimate control—roommates who get too crazy can be kicked out, but when they leave, so do their possessions.

As in *The Sims*, your character can work to develop certain skills; for example, pumping iron, swimming, or riding the mechanical bull will increase your Body ability. One motivation for developing skills is that higher skill levels allow you to make more money. A character with a Logic skill of 10 earns more by solving a math problem and selling the solution than someone with a Logic skill of 1. The only other apparent reason to develop skills is to earn the additional character interactions that are meted out with skill increases.

The other measurable gaming activity in *TSO* is making friends. The touted advantage of making friends is networking (what is this, a job fair?), plus more gestures become available to your character as she makes more friends. Each Sim can grant up to 10 friendships, with no limit to the number of friendships coming in.

Awful lot of weather we're having, huh?

The big problems with *TSO* appear after you've been logged in for awhile. One very noticeable difference from any other online game is that, rather than offering an existing world, this game is essentially a scaffold for the gamers to create their own world. That's great if the gamers are creative people, but a lot of the people in *TSO* aren't. Instead, they use their characters as little more than chat room avatars. If you're lucky enough to stumble onto a property with players actually willing to play, or if you

Some homes offer services, such as this wedding chapel.

Practicing the guitar all by my lonesome.

There are plenty of opportunities for the cage dancer in us all to get down and dirty.

A bunch of [illegible] Excitement [illegible]

This sweatshop-err, skills palace offers Sims a chance to get together and get smarter.

log on with a group of like-minded real-life friends, the game can be pretty entertaining; otherwise, the experience isn't much more riveting than average water cooler chat. And when you're trying to build up your Logic with a chess match—a chess match you cannot accelerate like you did in *The Sims*—you'll be praying for at least a competent, if not sparkling conversationalist.

Ways to win in *The Sims Online*? Well, right now, the only real "winning" is making it onto one of the Top 100 lists in your city, which offers you an achievement bonus. But, as of this writing, the only Top 100 list is "Most Liked Sim," so if you don't feel like chat room schmoozing, then there's not much for you to work toward.

You'll be praying for at least a competent if not sparkling conversationalist.

Easy street

The main problem with *TSO* is that you don't really need money. Players who have homes receive money whenever other players visit, and they also receive a cut when a visitor makes and sell items while on the property, so homeowners offer incentives to entice people to visit. Which means that you can eat for free, sleep for free, be entertained for free, and even acquire skills for free—which in turn helps you make more money that you don't need to spend. And if you don't need money, there's not a whole lot of reason to develop skills, and if you aren't developing skills or making money, then what exactly are you doing?

Most of the properties online right now are dedicated to either skill development or money making. The property owners and roommates are taking the game pretty seriously, so they aren't tolerating much harassment of other people, since there's the potential that you'll chase people off and cost the owners money. While that's their prerogative, the silliness of *The Sims* was what made the game so fun. Here, there are no random zombies wreaking havoc, no burglars, no sad clowns, no career paths. And characters who try to shake things up on their own are usually banned pretty quickly. Which leaves you with a lot of Sims whose primary goal is making more money. Frankly, it isn't very fun.

The servers seem pretty stable, if a little bit laggy, but they're not always very populated. Since the rate at which you acquire your skills and/or make money is directly related to how many other people are participating in the activity with you, it's more efficient for you to visit full properties, and those are sometimes hard to find.

Maxis has more plans for *The Sims Online*. By the time you read this, new Top 100 lists like "Most Hated Sim" should be live. Player made objects are also in the works, and death is scheduled to be coming sometime in the future. But for now, the game is pretty boring. If you like chat rooms, then this is your kind of game. If not, then steer clear.

VERDICT ★★★★★ – Instead of providing lol, this game kind of suxorz.

Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles

Hundreds of wasted hours await you BY BRUCE GERVK

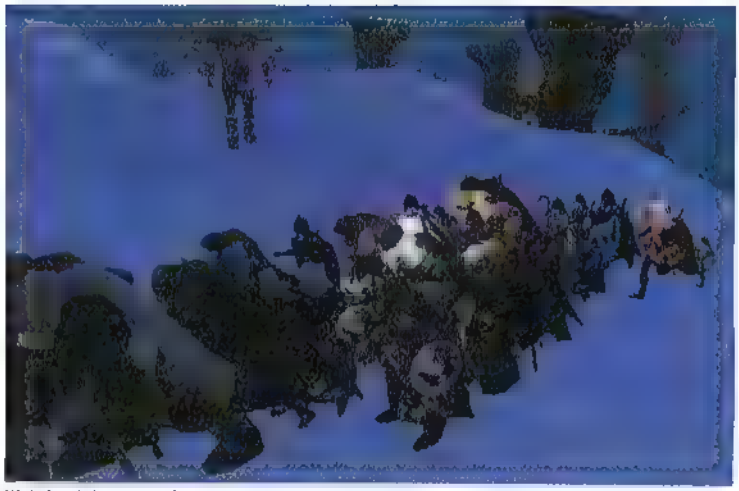
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER ABANDON ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE MMORPG
ESRB RATING TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE $29.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 1.4GHZ, 256MB RAM, 800MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD, DARK AGE OF CAMELOT ORIGINAL GAME, SUBSCRIPTION, INTERNET CONNECTION RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4 1.4GHZ, 384MB RAM, GEFORCE4 TI 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

When *Dark Age of Camelot* was first released, it made its mark with classic *EverQuest*-style gameplay that cut out a lot of tedium, and introduced a high-level, cooperative, player versus player dynamic as the game's ultimate goal. If this didn't turn you on the first time around, there isn't anything here to change your mind. However, if you were on every night and found yourself getting bored with the original game world, you're probably already exploring *Shrouded Isles'* enormous new content.

For each of the game's three realms, *Shrouded Isles* adds one new race, two new classes, and a whole new continent to explore. The new lands are mostly stocked with monsters appropriate for groups of characters Level 30 and above, so players will find themselves revisiting a lot of their old haunts if they decide to start new characters. For those with high-level characters, there are huge new areas to adventure in, and the addition of new dungeon areas makes high-level dungeon raids an enjoyable endeavor.

For a game that's so focused on upper-level realm-versus-realm combat, it's surprising that there's no new content in this area. The action remains restricted to frontier areas, since the keeps that guard the realms themselves remain impregnable. Although Mythic is considering starting a server where these keeps are weak enough to allow for actual realm invasions, the player-versus-player component of *Shrouded Isles* is essentially the same as before.



High-level dungeon raids are possible in places like Tuscaran Glacier.

A major feature of the expansion is the graphics engine. While significantly improved over the original (especially the monster models), the terrain textures and water effects have already been surpassed by *Asheron's Call 2*, and some graphics (like Hibernia's cartoonish pool table like vistas) seem dated. Nevertheless, thanks to good art design, *Shrouded Isles* extends the original's ability to create striking and memorable locations that give the game world a real sense of depth and character.

Mythic is constantly tweaking and updating the game from patch to patch, so comments on the specifics of gameplay will probably be obsolete before this review even makes it to the editor. What remains true is that *Dark Age of Camelot* has a large, active community and is constantly improving content. No one should play *DAOC* without *Shrouded Isles*.

VERDICT ★★★★½
Plenty of new stuff for the already addicted.

Cossacks: Back to War

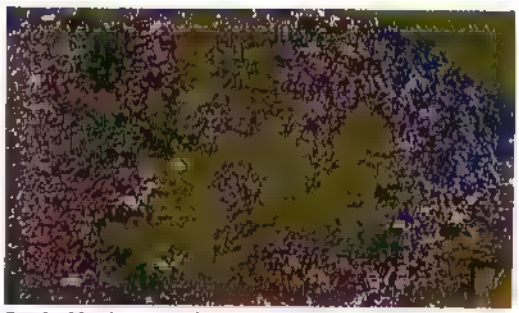
Thousands die, no one wins BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER CDV
DEVELOPER GSC GAME WORLD
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN; BLOOD, [illegible]
PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 200, 32MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS [illegible]
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Expansion packs are the roaches of the gaming industry. No matter how you stomp them, even the remote possibility of profit spawns them by the dozens. Technically not an expansion, *Cossacks: Back to War* is a standalone that incorporates the gameplay features of *Cossacks: European Wars* and *Cossacks: The Art of War* into a lackluster package with 101 scenarios, a tutorial campaign, two new nations, and a few extra units.

The *Cossacks* series takes place in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, and gameplay is traditional RTS fare except in scope. *Cossacks* supports up to 8,000 units on a map, and you'll regularly have hordes of peasants and massive armies. It's initially novel, but the masochistic pleasure of creating armies of thousands, one soldier at a time, then watching them die by the hundreds, wanes before long. There's just too much micromanaging for the game to remain enjoyable for long.



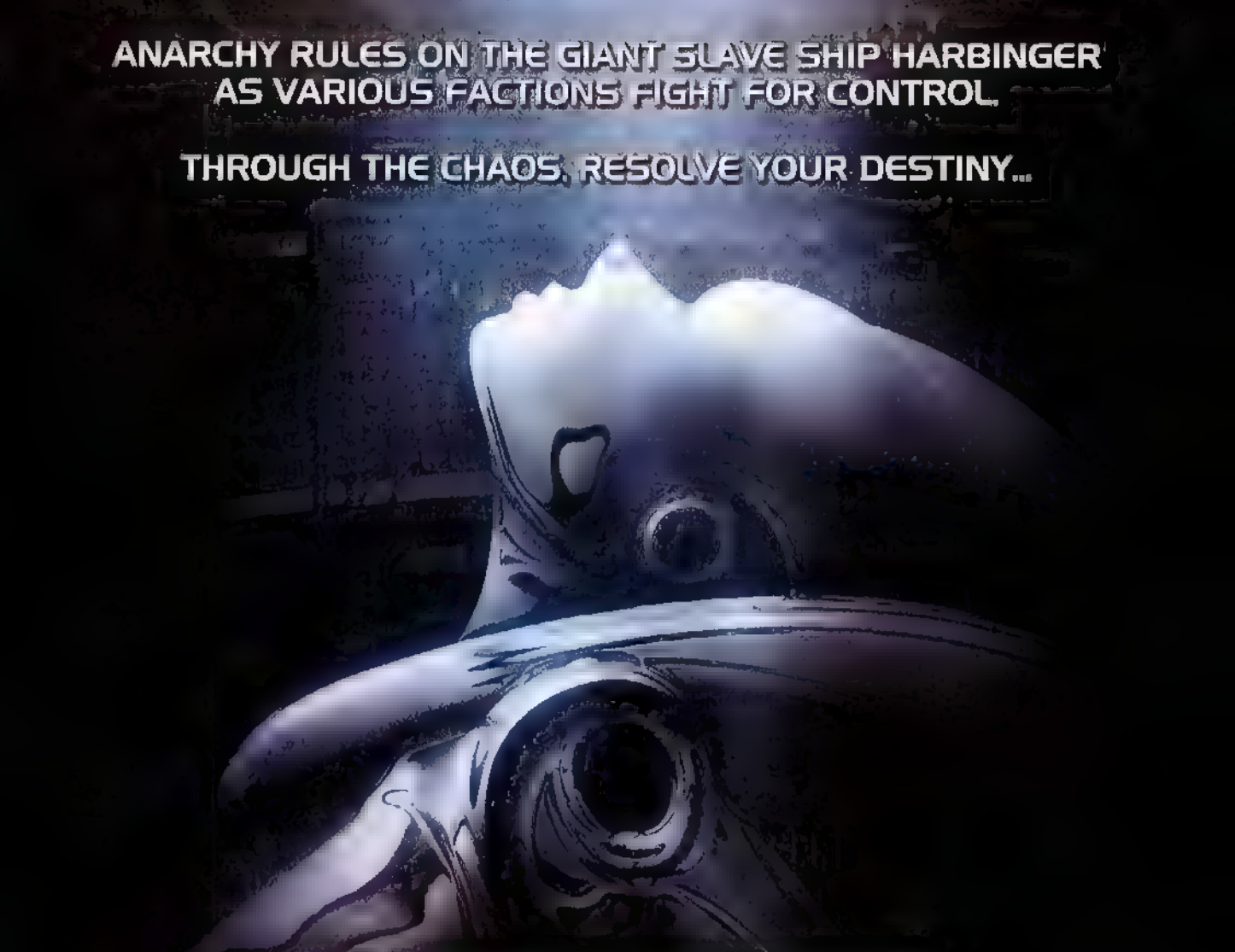
Spaniard hordes versus Dutch hordes. Who can tell the difference?

Cossacks makes no attempt to hold your interest with intriguing story lines or captivating campaigns. Some scenarios are fun, but only diehards will have the endurance to find the gems in the horde. These self-flagellating fanatics will certainly be entertained, but why pay when they can find plenty of custom scenarios to download for free?

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
Everybody now—*Cossacks*! Hunh! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again! Yeah!

ANARCHY RULES ON THE GIANT SLAVE SHIP HARBINGER
AS VARIOUS FACTIONS FIGHT FOR CONTROL.

THROUGH THE CHAOS, RESOLVE YOUR DESTINY...



...AND CLAIM THE ULTIMATE REWARD.
YOUR FREEDOM.

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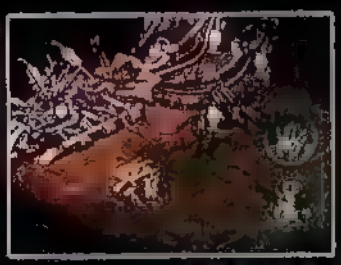

TEEN T
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BLOOD
USE OF DRUGS
VIOLENCE

PC CD ROM

- INTENSE ACTION RPG
- IMMENSE GAME ASSETS
- UNIQUE SCI-FI STORYLINE

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SILVERBACK ENTERTAINMENT

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1998: Unreal forever changes the face of the first person shooter.

2003: Unreal II – The Awakening...does it again.

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CGW

"Without question...will change the face of first-person shooters..."
PLAY

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GameSpy.com

"And while the graphics are an excellent...draw, there's much more to talk about here – from the surprisingly compelling story...to the sheer variety of environments to the awesome balance and design."
pc.ign.com

"...the best single-player game I've seen since Half-Life and Return to Castle Wolfenstein. For you fans of single-player FPS, watch out – there's a new 800lb Gorilla coming. You have been warned."
actiontrip.com

"The defend-your-base missions that include commanding a squad of your own troopers is some of the most exciting gaming moments I have experienced."
XGR.com

"Pants-wetting visuals and physicsit's firmly placed to set the benchmark for this year's slew of FPS games...it's going to be a hard one to beat."
computerandvideogames.com

ATARI

AVAILABLE NOW

MATURE M Blood and Gore Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

LEGEND EPIC GAMES EAX DOLBY DIGITAL

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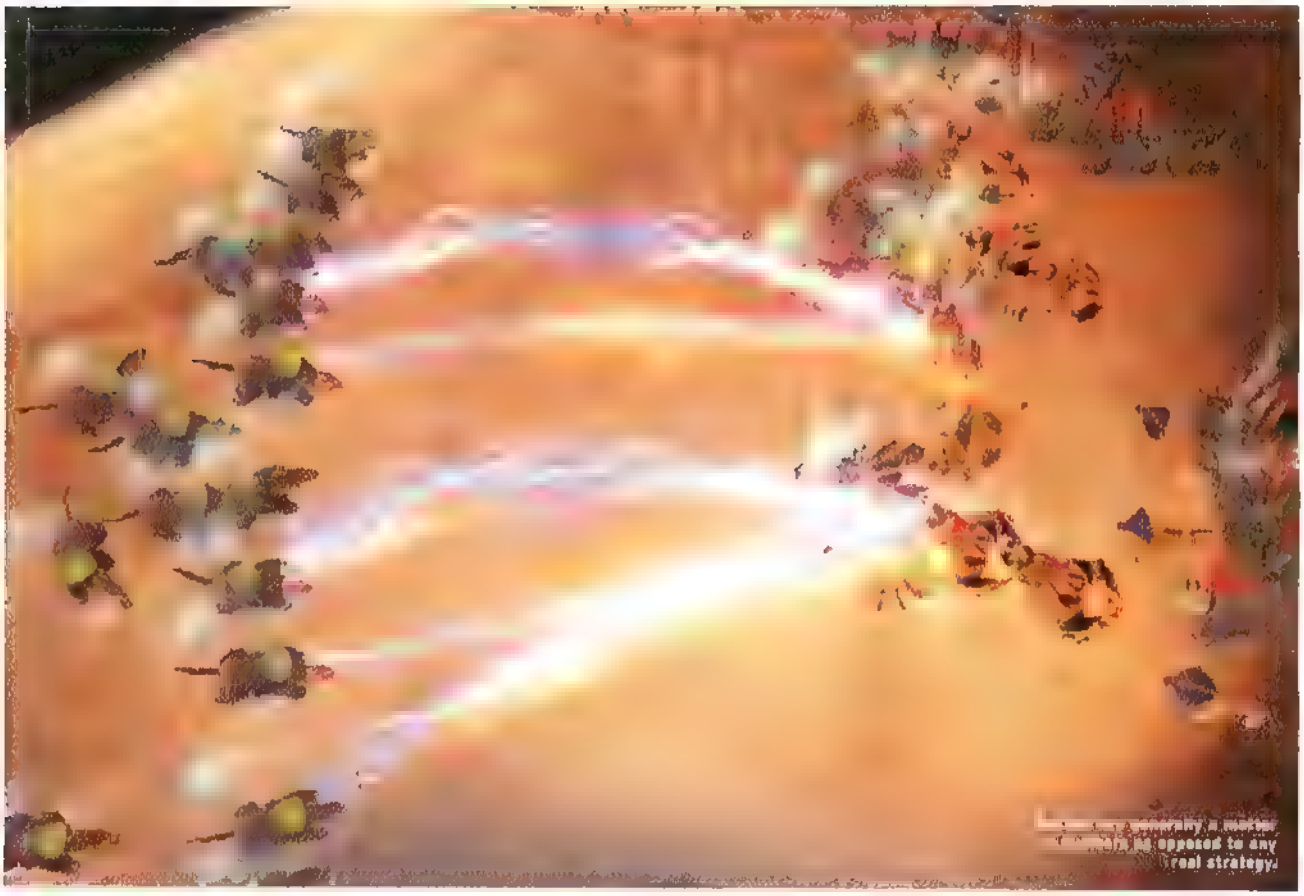


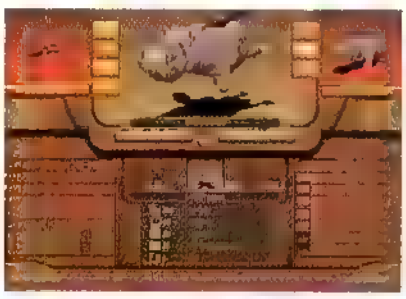
Impossible Creatures

Stalking the competition BY RON DULIN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER RELIC ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING TEEN; COMIC MISCHIEF, VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET (2-6 PLAYERS)

Old joke: What do you get when you cross an elephant with a rhinoceros? Relic Entertainment, maker of 1999's excellent *Homeworld*, has built a whole game around the punch line. *Impossible Creatures* is a real time strategy game with a single hook: You create units by combining animals. It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story. But the game is all style and little substance. *Impossible Creatures* doesn't have the strategic complexity of more recent RTS games, so while designing units can be entertaining, putting them to use is often a repetitive task.



Combining creatures is the best part of the game.

Pulp fiction

Impossible Creatures takes place in the 1930s. The protagonist is James Chance, a scruffy adventurer who is contacted by his long lost father. He learns that the senior Chance was involved with the development of sigma technology, which allows the combining of animals. You must help James put the technology to use, gathering animal DNA and creating bigger and better units as the plot grows increasingly silly. Relic has opted to ape sources like *King Kong*, *101 Dalmatians*, and even *Mad Monster Party* for its characters, creating an occasionally humorous but not very engaging story on which to hang the missions.

These missions follow a fairly typical build a base, create an army, sweep-the-map blueprint. There are occasional deviations, giving you challenges like stopping a fire from reaching your base or finding a missing cohort. Most missions also require that you collect the DNA of resident creatures, and occasionally these will allow you to build significantly better units. The missions are fairly predictable, and the A.I. seems more scripted than dynamic. Also, your computer opponents always have better unit components than you do, so you're constantly fighting an uphill battle.

Building imperfect beasts

The best part of the game is designing your units. You choose two creatures and mix and match segments. There are some interesting combinations, such as flying hippos, and lobsters with bulls' heads. The unit's final characteristics and stat sticks are determined by the chosen segments. For instance, slapping praying mantis legs on a bull will give the unit a powerful leaping/goring attack. It's fun to tweak the available combinations, trying to get the most beast for your buck. The possibilities are varied but, unfortunately,

The story is told both with in-engine cut-scenes and the sort of stylized art utilized in *Homeworld*.

He's even called "The King."

The chameopotomus uses its tongue as a ranged attack.

the useful combinations aren't. Though weaker creatures have some unique abilities, such as burrowing or poison, these characteristics often aren't as useful as pure might and defensive strength. What's worse, flying creatures are all but useless: They're usually weak, and antiair towers are so powerful that they don't stand a chance. Flying whales look great as they sail around their home base, but try to free your Willy-birds from an opponent and they'll be torn to shreds.

You can only keep nine creature designs in your zoo, so there's a constant need to rethink your army. The small number of available units seems like an artificial constraint in the single-player campaign, and it's most likely there to keep some semblance of balance in multiplayer games, in which you load one of your armies and have at your opponents. Multiplayer and skirmish games are all about who has the better army for the map, so the strategy all takes place before the match even starts. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can make games quick and painful when someone has a far superior force. You can also select from some predesigned armies, or have a random army selected for you. The latter, though, is a foolish choice: It's no fun finding yourself on an island map with no aquatic or flying units.

The rest of the game is straightforward. There's a small research tree that allows you to improve your base defenses and the efficiency of your harvesters. You can also research improvements to individual units' stat sticks, which is a helpful, if somewhat unsatisfying, way of strengthening your army. Base building is likewise straightforward, but buildings look so similar that even late in the game you may have to consult the pop-up help to determine which is what. Luckily, the animals look good when you zoom in and watch them work, though they all look similar when playing from the default distance—especially if you're fond of a particular torso.

It's a good concept set against an intentionally silly story—too bad it's all style, little substance.

The ability to play Dr. Moreau keeps *Impossible Creatures* from being a completely generic RTS, but the missions don't require strategy so much as huge armies and brute force. Most likely, the novelty of the campaign will wear off before you can access the strongest creatures and answer the riddle posed by the game with an elephino of your own.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This by-the-numbers RTS fails to generate any magnetism, animal or otherwise.

Axing the visual effects of spells would clip the wings of *Archangel* even more.

If more angels had grenade launchers, I bet there'd be a lot fewer atheists.

Archangel

To hell in a handbasket

BY DENICE COOK

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER JOWOOD PRODUCTIONS

DEVELOPER METROPOLIS SOFTWARE

GENRE ACTION/RPG

ESRB RATING MATURE: BLOOD, STRONG LANGUAGE, VIOLENCE

PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4 1.4GHZ, 256MB RAM, 800MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

While driving home one night, Michael Travinsky scours the radio for good songs. "Sympathy for the Devil" gets the ax. "Earth Angel" is staticky. "Highway to Hell" cuts out suddenly as a truck hits his car....Michael comes to in a medieval monastery, where resident monks promptly pronounce him "The Awaited One" and hand him the Sword of Light, an evil-purging magical weapon. Unable to remember his past, Michael accepts his supposed destiny to destroy every nasty thing that fouls the Earth. If only Michael could read the fine print on the sword—"Using this weapon depletes your spirit energy in three seconds, and you must then die by a calendar to replenish energy"—he might be a little less likely to undertake this great quest, I know I would be.

It seems that the local Master of Darkness has unleashed a demonic army, and villagers are dropping faster than your Spirit energy bar. After brief tutorials on jumping, sneaking, and slashing, you're sent out on a third-person adventure, where a floating head asks you to choose one of two battle forms you will be able to temporarily morph into throughout the game. The ghost form offers invisibility plus one combat spell, but takes twice normal injury from the infernal. Alternatively, the warrior form is slicing armor is more torturous to the tainted, while its armor-like skin takes half-normal damage from the damned.

Nearby enemies often target and beat the hell out of your supposedly invisible ghost form. The ghostly combat spell is also slow and weak. The warrior fares better in battle, but in either case, once spirit energy drains you become a human track star while waiting for it to refill.

While progressing through *Archangel*'s endlessly circling, map bereft, identical-for-ghost-and-warrior paths, you receive item-gathering quests from NPCs. You also earn upgradeable spells like Regeneration, Hypnosis, and Holy Protection by slaughtering the sinister, and can increase form-transformation time as well. Regeneration uses spirit energy to increase health. This is critical, as first aid kits are scarce. Sinfully, spells are accessible only via inventory scrolling, which freezes you but not your aggressors. Slaying scads of satanic sycophants transforms Michael's appearance into that of a supposed archangel, but there's little enemy variation, and even less A.I., and the copycat bosses just require repetitive slashing with the Sword of Light (in between those pesky spirit-energizing retreats). You can't block attacks, either.

You collect knives, arrows, axes, and guns, depending upon which of the three inexplicably linked worlds throughout time (Old Ages, Berlin 2039, or Forgotten Place) you inhabit. As for those worlds, various monks and an angel make cut scene appearances in them, but there's little connection between lands. *Archangel*'s plot is almost nonexistent.

Although fire, water, and spell effects are decent and the settings colorful, *Archangel*'s dated 3D graphics feature grainy pathways and backdrops that sometimes leap forward from the shadows. Jerky, cookie-cutter character models are blocky and expressionless, and bystanders ignore battles.

The diverse soundtrack is divine, but the voiceovers range from good to damnable, and dialogue is lamer than a wingless angel. As far as heavenly gaming goes, this *Archangel* doesn't just fall, it plummets from grace.

***Archangel*'s plot is almost nonexistent.**

The only weapon that damages bosses is the Sword of Light, which drains spirit energy so fast, there's nothing left to fuel spells with.

VERDICT ★½

The light at the end of the tunnel needs a new bulb.

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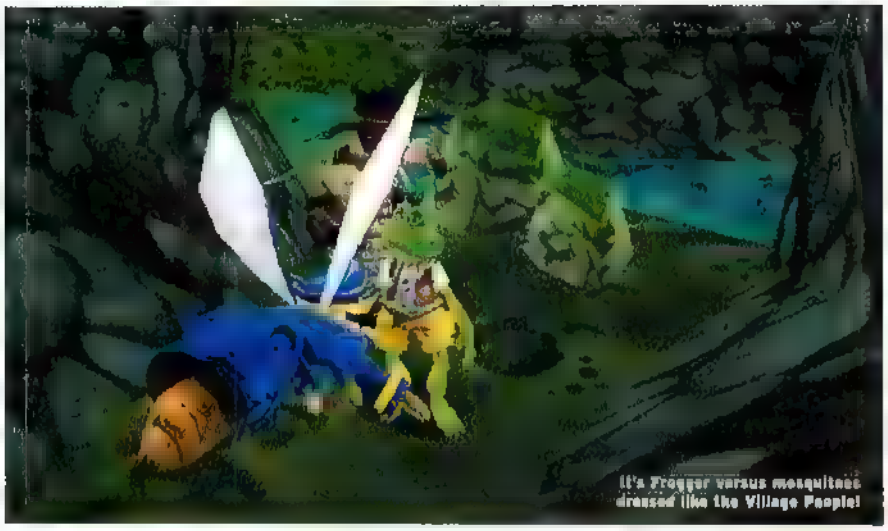

It's Frogger versus mosquitoes dressed like the Village People!

Frogger: The Great Quest

It ain't easy seein' green... BY DARREN GLADSTONE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER PAPA YETI STUDIO
GENRE SEDATIVE
ESRB EVERYONE
PRICE $29.99
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 500, 64MB RAM, 400MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 4, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

Frogger and I go way back: The arcade original had me frantically navigating rush hour traffic with a pile of quarters at my side. And now that I think about it, Hasbro's 3D sequel in 1998 wasn't half-bad either. But it's all over now. In fact, after playing this insipid *Rayman* wannabe crap, I'm ready to take the little mothercroaker out back, chop off his hindquarters, and serve 'em up at a prissy Parisian bistro.

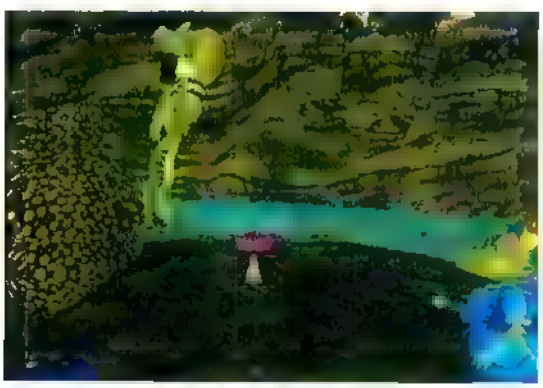
The old green guy now has a more human demeanor (replete with an Old Navy-esque vest and cargo shorts), and you guide him through a half-assed console port by jumping, spitting out loogies, and performing frog-fu chops. That isn't too bad, but the uninspired, me-too gameplay—and the problems that come with 3D platforming titles—plagues *Frogger: The Great Quest* every hop of the way.

Saying the camera controls are hard to manage as you try to navigate your way through the game is a gross understatement. Whether you are climbing up a tree (I'm assuming so you can hang yourself) or spelunking in a cavern, even the most basic areas become a constant battle of readjusting the camera angle on the fly. But the really annoying thing to watch is the painfully ported graphics. The god-awful grainy graphics (maybe 800x600 resolution—if I'm being kind) should be considered a felony.

The only thing "great" about this quest is finally being done with it.

OK, so maybe I'm not the target audience for this game. Maybe I'm being overly harsh here. But for the money that they're asking, I could just as easily snag a title that's a whole lot less offensive to my senses—for example, *Rayman*.

On its best day, *Frogger* is just a pale imitation of a good platforming title. The only thing "great" about this quest is finally being done with it. Hell, the fact that I needed to come back and revisit *Frogger* to fill up this much space on a page has made this my own personal Vietnam. Ribbit.


The ladies love it when you puff out your sack.

VERDICT ★★★★★
This game will make you wish he got run over by a truck back in 1983.

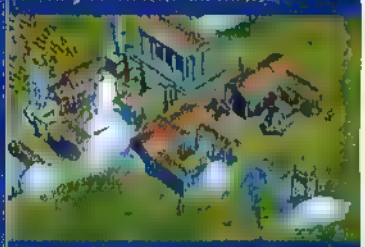
GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

Age of Mythology/Arx Fatalis

By Thomas L. McDonald

The number of polished RTS games this past year—*Medieval: Total War*, *Age of Mythology*, *WarCraft III*, and *Warlords Battlecry II*—shows a genre that has achieved a rare level of refinement. Each of these games has received some postrelease tweaking, but in almost all cases, these were fine-tunings, not game-saving overhauls. Ensemble...



...continues this trend with *Age of Mythology* version 1.02, dedicated primarily to minor balance issues.

Most changes come in the form of numerous unit tweaks. Loki's ox carts lose 80 hit points and ancestors lose 40. Odin gets a hunting bonus in order to increase Odin village and dwarf hunting rate from +10 percent to +20 percent. Thor's pig sticker improvement increases hunting rate from +10 percent to +20 percent. Raiding cavalry have +10 percent more Pierce and +5 percent Hack armor. Helepoli—one of the most problematic units in the game—now have -15 percent Hack armor, occupy +1 population slots, and have -50 hit points. The costs for the Norse longhouse, Isis obelisk, and Egyptian barracks are modified. A minor stat error in Ensemble Studios' Online is also fixed.

Oh, those wacky French. Arkane Studios has issued a patch for *Arx Fatalis* that fixes one problem, but for maximum confusion they left the version number at 1.15. Has it come to the point where small development houses can't even afford the price of a "6"? Anyway, if a player failed to free Kultar from prison at the beginning of the game, Kultar would attack the player in the castle. This led to a dead end because the sewers wouldn't open. Well, this is fixed in unnamed patch number-well, let's just call it 1.15 Part Deux and maybe we can chip in to buy Arkane a new version number.

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1C MADDOX GAMES

Ubi Soft

The city's ghoul invasion barely registers for us here. But a shopping cart in someone's apartment? Now that's weird.

Silent Hill 2

No thrills and maybe two chills BY ERIK WOLPAW

GAME STATS
PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER KONAMI
GENRE SURVIVAL DADAISM
ESRB RATING MATURE, BLOOD, GORE, VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99 REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 700, 64MB RAM, 1.8GB HARD DRIVE
SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT NONE

The *Silent Hill 2* box cover folds open to reveal small, dark screenshots and enthusiastic quotes from reviews of the original PS2 version. *Stuff* magazine warns, "Don't play this terrifying action game alone," while *Maxim* calls it "hands-down the creepiest videogame ever." It's possible that America's men's lifestyle magazines somehow mistook confusion for terror because *Silent Hill 2* doesn't make much sense even when judged against the already lax sense-making standards of the survival horror genre. Which might be excusable if it was scary—which it isn't—or if it featured decent combat—which it doesn't.

As the game starts, you've received a letter from your dead wife asking you to meet her in a town called Silent Hill. The search for her unfolds with a sort of dream logic—the logic that leads people to believe you'd be interested in hearing their boring dreams. Every character you run across appears to have one foot in a plot from some other game. Most of the dialogue and character actions make no sense, especially considering that the streets of Silent Hill are filled with monsters on a killing rampage. People go from being sarcastic to fearful to your best pal to your worst enemy, all within the span of a sentence. Virtually every word from the characters' mouths is as senseless as the puzzles. And it's all accompanied by a hugely inappropriate light-jazz soundtrack. *Silent Hill 2* may be the world's first survival-Dada game.

Your main enemy is a beefy guy in a butcher's smock wearing what looks like a rusty sink on his head. To be fair, Pyramid Head (as he's called) is a weirdly creepy invention. Other than that, though, *Silent Hill 2* is all hackneyed atmosphere and no payoff. The city is blanketed in thick fog (later replaced by thick inky blackness). For fog to inspire terror, however, it needs to obscure something terrifying. Instead, it merely obscures the places you need to go and the crazy objects you need to find to solve the harebrained puzzles, making the fog significantly more aggravating than scary.

The graphics engine is fully 3D, but the camera isn't really under your control.

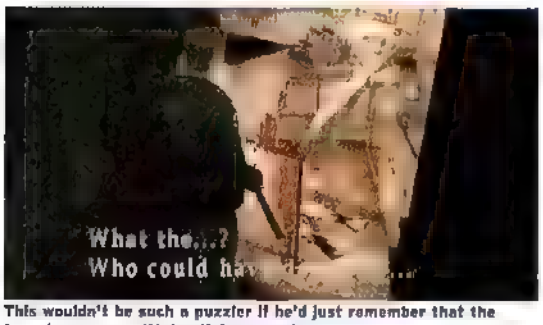
Prepare for a whole lot of wandering around aimlessly in the fog.

This might have made sense if the camera had been used to generate sudden shocks, but there isn't a single startling moment in the game. The camera's tendency to face you so that you can't see what's in front of you seems to have been engineered for maximum annoyance. There's a command that rotates the camera behind you, but it only works sporadically. These camera problems, combined with stiff, awkward controls and a lack of monster variety, make combat very unsatisfying.

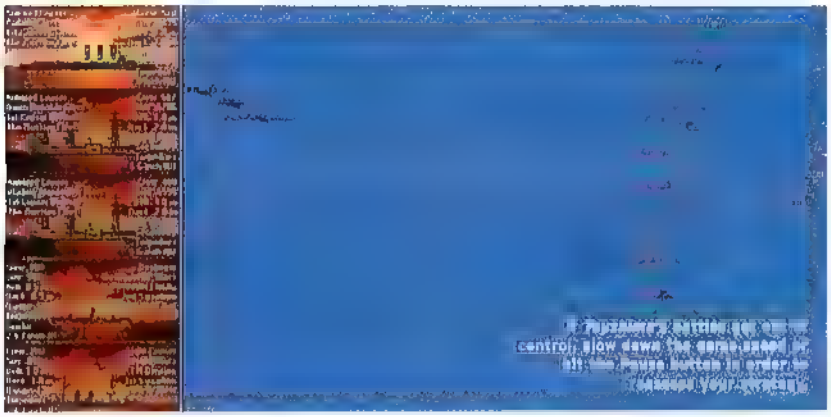
With its lackadaisical pace, clumsy action sequences, and surreal atmosphere that's more disjointed than disturbing, *Silent Hill 2* is a nightmare, but only to play.

VERDICT ★★★★★
It'll bore you...to death.

***Silent Hill 2* may be the world's first survival-Dada game.**



This wouldn't be such a puzzler if he'd just remember that the town is overrun with terrifying monsters.



Tsushima

Gesundheit! BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER HPS SIMULATIONS
DEVELOPER HPS SIMULATIONS
GENRE WARGAME ESRB RATING
TEEN; BLOOD AND VIOLENCE
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM 133 MHZ, 32MB RAM, 250MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, INTERNET PRICE $39.99

John Tiller and his development team are known for creating top notch wargames without the "messy distraction" of eye candy. *Tsushima*, the second installment from HPS Simulations' *Naval Campaigns* series, offers balanced playability rarely seen in war simulations.

For those left out of military-history circles, *Tsushima* was a ferocious naval battle fought during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The Japanese Imperial navy defeated Russia's Baltic fleet near the Straits of Tsushima in 1905, and this decisive engagement ultimately dictated the outcome of the war.

Tsushima offers the balanced playability lacking in most war simulations of this period.

Simplistic in design, *Tsushima* allows players to pick either the Russian or Japanese side, or both, with the eventual outcome resting solely on a player's strategic acumen. The tactical naval engagements are fought in real time and are balanced by the Objectives feature, which makes otherwise lopsided scenarios playable. You won't need to destroy the entire enemy fleet that outnumbers you three to one in order to score a win.

Many factors are involved in successfully commanding your fleet. You must understand the capabilities of the various steamships, including primary and secondary ranges, torpedo attacks, mines, opening and closing ranges, as well as ship speeds and damage assessments. Managing all of this and fighting against the deft AI can be daunting at times, especially if you're using the Fog of War option. However, there are several speeds of play, and you can issue orders while paused.

The game also provides a simulation of the smaller, individual portions of the epic battle. There's an alternate version where the Russians get to combine their Baltic and Pacific fleets for a massive engagement with the Imperial navy. *Tsushima* includes the battles of Yellow Sea and Ulsan, fought during the Russo-Japanese War, which allows the game to offer a variety of scenarios.

Tsushima has a multiplayer experience with more than two players (only one Admiral per side), and it comes with a full-featured scenario editor, allowing you to create and modify scenarios using a chart overlay along with naval charts of actual battles. If you're a naval tactician or a wargamer, then *Tsushima* is for you.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

John Tiller takes another obscure conflict in history and makes it playable.

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Neocron

In the future, life is...boring BY GEORGE JONES

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER CDV SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER REAKKTOR MEDIA
GENRE MMORPG
ESRB RATING MATURE; SEXUAL THEMES, STRONG LANGUAGE, USE OF DRUGS, VIOLENCE
PRICE $39.99; $9.99 PER MONTH
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II, 32MB RAM, 1.4GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 56.6K MODEM
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS 128MB RAM, [illegible]
CONNECTION MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LOTS AND LOTS

It's not often that pacing problems plague a massively multiplayer RPG. More often than not, this is a genre that overwhelms and paralyzes gamers with way too much, way too soon. But not *Neocron*. From the moment you enter CDV Software's postapocalyptic online world, you'll be confused, bored...and lonely. Which is a shame, because as far as concepts go, *Neocron* has promise.

But structure and setting aren't enough these days. Not anymore—we gamers need fundamentally strong gameplay in our online experiences to stay interested and occupied. Failing that, we at least need a large, enthusiastic community in the game world. *Neocron*, unfortunately, falls startlingly short on both fronts.

Clue number one that *Neocron* is on the wrong track, to get into the game's backstory, you have to read 16 pages of text at the back of the manual. What a bummer—it's an interesting postnuclear setting that should have been conveyed in the context of the gameplay. Clue number two comes the moment you exit your alter ego's apartment and enter the game world. You only have two apparent options to build up your wealth: courier missions or combat. Both will provide a mind-numbing halt to your enthusiasm for *Neocron*.

The courier missions consist of moving from one part of the city to another, picking up a package, then delivering it. Yawn. The upside of these missions is that you get to take in the spectacular sights and sounds of the city, but still...

So, this leaves you with combat. However, if you didn't select the GenTank (genetically modified human tank) character type, the typical newbie diet of rats, roaches, and bats is going to repeatedly kick your ass. Thankfully when you die, you respawn in your apartment, where you only have to pay 200 credits to retrieve your backpack and belongings. The problem is that you start with 600 credits. Die four times and you're out of cash, with no way to get your belongings back until you get more money. Oops—looks like it's back to being a delivery boy.

It's all so frustrating and depressing—haven't MMORPGs evolved beyond these basic boring notions of gameplay? Open-ended online play does not mean directionless, slow-paced gaming where you have to pay your dues for hours before anything exciting happens. Who's going to wait around for that?

These game design issues are compounded by recurring server errors and crashes. And then there's the lackluster social nature of the world. Most of *Neocron* is a ghost town, utterly devoid of human characters, which feels decidedly nonfuturistic. While a community of gamers does exist, it tends to congregate in a few choice spots that you'll have to stumble upon. Unfortunately, gamers in *Neocron* aren't all that friendly. You'll get answers to your questions, but that's about it.

As you play deeper into the game, *Neocron* does become a little more entertaining and complex, with grander missions and greater intrigue. But as it stands, very few gamers will make it that far—certainly not at the rate of 10 bucks a month.

Darkness, neon lights, lots of men with facial hair...is this an MMORPG or the Blue Oyster?

Be careful in the red-light district. Entering the Pussycat Club repeatedly crashed the game for me.

From the moment you enter CDV Software's postapocalyptic online world, you'll be confused, bored...and lonely.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Reakktor Media should have spent less time on *Neocron*'s look and more time on the game's feel.

REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
America's Army: Operations	1/03	The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—and it's totally free	★★★★½
Astonia III	3/03	Deeper and better thought-out than many prettier MMORPGs	★★★½☆
Battlefield 1942	1/03	The Multiplayer Game of the Year is a complete blast	★★★★½
Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf	3/03	Often dull and unchallenging, it adds little to *Battle Realms*	★★☆☆☆
Civilization III: Play the World	2/03	Inexcusably buggy as shipped; unplayable without the patch	★☆☆☆☆
Combat Flight Simulator 3	2/03	Launched without adequate flight testing	★★★½☆
Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin	2/03	The closest thing we have to the perfect wargame	★★★★½
Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater	3/03	Budget price with better-than-average gameplay	★★★½☆
Divine Divinity	12/02	An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and worst sense	★★★½☆
Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair	3/03	Buggy, poorly designed, and disappointing, it's still better than the arcade version	★★☆☆☆
Earth & Beyond	2/03	*EverQuest* in space	★★★½☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	8/02	No surprise that the definitive, open-ended RPG is our RPG of 2002	★★★★½
The Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal	3/03	This expansion hits on both the strengths and weaknesses of *Morrowind*	★★★½☆
EverQuest: Planes of Power	2/03	More fuel for the fires of die-hard *EQ* fans	★★★½☆
FIFA 2003	2/03	A good soccer game with World Cup-quality graphics	★★★½☆
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	1/03	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one	★★★★½
G.I. Combat	3/03	It's *Close Combat* gone 3D and gone bad	★☆☆☆☆
Hearts of Iron	2/03	An enormously ambitious WWII strategy game with a lot of flaws	★★★½☆
Hegemonia: Legions of Iron	3/03	Not enough strategy, not enough game	★★½☆☆
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	1/03	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth	★★★★½
Iron Storm	2/03	A boring, buggy *Medal of Honor* lite, with bad A.I.	★★☆☆☆
James Bond 007: NightFire	3/03	Almost got the first-ever half-star rating in *CGW*	★½☆☆☆
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	2/03	The best *MechWarrior* yet	★★★★½
Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Spearhead	2/03	Taut, well-scripted add-on that's just too short	★★★★☆
Medieval: Total War	12/02	The ultimate historical strategy game	★★★★★
NASCAR Thunder 2003	2/03	Solid, but not the same caliber as Papyrus' *NASCAR Racing 2002*	★★★½☆
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	2/03	One of the best high-octane racing experiences around	★★★½☆
NHL 2003	2/03	The same old arcade hockey game, with updated rosters and downgraded A.I.	★★★☆☆
No One Lives Forever 2	1/03	As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too	★★★★½
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	10/02	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion	★★★★½
O.R.B.	3/03	This *Homeworld* clone abandons much of what that game did well	★★☆☆☆
Platoon	3/03	Every bit as bad as you'd expect it to be	★☆☆☆☆
Project Nomads	2/03	Pretty floating islands crash on the shores of mediocre gameplay	★★★☆☆
RalliSport Challenge	3/03	The fun of the Xbox version doesn't quite make the jump to PC	★★★☆☆
Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood	3/03	A fresh, deep squad-based game in the *Commandos* vein	★★★★☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	1/03	Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs	★★★½☆
SimCity 4	3/03	A fresh, gorgeous take on a classic, but you'll need a beefy computer to run it	★★★★☆
Soldiers of Anarchy	3/03	Save time and money and pull *Fallout Tactics* from your local bargain bin	★★½☆☆
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	3/03	The Next Gen license is wasted on a game a few big patches away from being good	★★★☆☆
Strike Fighters: Project 1	3/03	Months of bug fixes, polish, and user-mods away from being worth your money	★★☆☆☆
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	3/03	Better than *Links* the way Tiger is better than you	★★★★½
Treasure Planet	2/03	*Starfleet Command* for kids, with rocket-powered sailing vessels	★★★★☆
Unreal Tournament 2003	1/03	Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay	★★★★☆
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos	9/02	A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement	★★★★☆
Worms Blast	2/03	*Worms* goes *Bust a Move* and loses something in the process	★★½☆☆
Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania	3/03	If you gotta have whales and seals in your zoo, buy it	★★★☆☆

CGW RECOMMENDS

Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings ★★★★☆

With the original overshadowed by *EverQuest*, this first big next-gen MMORPG came with a bit of a chip on its shoulder. While it hasn't totally blown us away, *AC2* is doing a lot of things right: a great newbie experience, stellar graphics, and a forgiving skill system that makes sense.

Arx Fatalis ★★★★½

We admit our expectations weren't the highest for this out-of-nowhere, French-developed *Ultima Underworld* wannabe, so maybe that's why we were initially wowed. But by the time we finished the game, *Arx* had earned our respect, not just beaten our lowered expectations. It may have the most annoying interface of any RPG ever, but it looks great, plays better, and is as worthy of your time as any of the more ballyhooed RPGs from 2002.

Splinter Cell ★★★★½

Once upon a time, console ports were the absolute dregs of PC gaming—uniformly horrible, garish, buggy wastes of time and money. Not any longer—if *GTA3* didn't convince you those days were over, *Splinter Cell* definitely will. Loaded with atmosphere and cool gadgets, this amazing first-person sneaker is even better on the PC thanks to sharper graphics and mouse-look.

Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money Edited by William O'Neal

FINALLY, AN LCD THAT WON'T LET GAMERS DOWN

[illegible]

E[illegible] capable of [illegible] bright and scintillating. But although everyone agrees that flat panels are damn sexy, LCD monitors have historically had a couple of huge downsides that leave the average gamer unwilling to buy one: price and resolution.

The fact remains that purchasing a decent 17-inch or 19-inch LCD monitor is going to sink you into a very deep hole. Add to that limited resolution and refresh rates, and it's no wonder that gamers shy away from them. Who wants to limit their Radeon 9700 Pro or GeForce4 Ti 4600 GPU to playing *Unreal Tournament 2003* at 12x7 simply because that's the highest resolution your monitor can handle?

By [illegible]

Hitachi's 17-inch CML174 LCD monitor, though, comes packed with innovation. It has a sleek enclosure and small bezel, which makes it the smallest 17-inch LCD on the planet using both DVI-D and analog. It also comes with a five-year warranty, making this one of the better values on the market. Viewing angles are more relaxed with the CML174's SuperView technology, which provides a full 160 to 170 degree range. That's especially nice considering how restrictive LCD viewing angles tend to be—basically, you have to sit directly in front of them to get the best visual.

Firing up a couple of games of *Age of Mythology*, *Battlefield 1942*, and *Unreal Tournament 2003* in 1280x1024 at 60Hz showed excellent image quality. Saturation and clarity also are top notch—with blues and reds really shining through. The screen's faster response times kept the action from choking. As a matter of fact, the 12 millisecond and 135MHz video clock frequency are way better than any other LCD monitor in its class. It has a lot to brag about.

If you crave an LCD monitor for gaming, then the CML174 is the one to get. Take it from us, you won't be disappointed.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Hitachi proves gaming on a 17-inch LCD is, in fact, rewarding.

The CML174 monitor comes packed with innovation.

Many Cards in One From Hercules

Gaming action takes on an entirely different perspective BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

PRICE STATS

MANUFACTURER: HERCULES

PRICE: $99.99

OK, you're probably asking, "What the hell is a DV imaging card review doing in a computer gaming rag?" Good question. It may seem as though we've been hanging out at the bar with Wil a little too much, but we just thought you'd be interested in something cool from a company known for its quality gaming components. Hercules has been offering a plethora of video and audio cards for years, and the company has made watching and creating DVD movies on your gaming rig a treat.

So, what's with the DV Action Pro? It's really several cards in one. First and foremost, it's a video editing card that allows you to create your own DVDs, CDs, and other media in MPEG1 and MPEG2 formats. The user-friendly software packages are extremely easy to learn, and the ShuttlePRO device is easy to navigate. Just drag and drop your scenes, music, titles, commentaries, transitions, and special effects with programs like *MediaStudio Pro*, *DVD Authoring*, or *3D Cool*. Pretty neat, eh?

Second, and more to the point, the DV Action Pro allows you to play movies in DVDs, SVCDs, VCDs, and other media on your PC and home DVD player, creating less of a bottleneck on the processor. To use the DV Action Pro as a video capture card, you can attach a PAL or NTSC capable camcorder in any of the three FireWire ports. You can even capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and then e-mail them to all your buddies.

Now the world can have the DVD full of your gaming highlights that it's been clamoring for.

VERDICT ★★★★½

It's not technically a gaming device. But heck, knowledge is power, right?

You can capture and edit your favorite gaming moments and e-mail them to your buddies.

RADEON™ 9700 PRO

Affordable and Effective Optical Storage

A perfect CD-RW solution BY JOEL DURHAN

TECH STATS

WHO: ASUS

PRICE: $75

It takes a near-perfect product to get this picky reviewer to type "None" in the cons category. However, with its CRW-4012A USB 2.0 External CD-RW drive, Asus has constructed quite a marvel: It does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

With speeds of 40x (write), 12x (rewrite), and 48x (read), it's a solid state-of-the-art drive. Asus concentrates on usability, forgoing fancy-pants, Iomega-style styling for functionality. The CRW-4012A is a simple computer beige rectangle, 9x6x2 inches. It requires its own AC power and comes with a small adapter, and it's as portable as any product in its category.

Asus went all out on the documentation, including a friendly 26-page manual (we didn't know there was that much to say about a CD drive) and a foldout quick-start guide. Also included is a copy of *Ahead Nero Burning ROM* 5, an exceptional audio and data CD-burning software package.

In testing, the drive performed remarkably well, comparable to any internal unit. It wrote a 75MB file to a CD-R in 74 seconds, matching the time it took an EIDE 40x/16x/40x drive on the same PC to write the file. Both drives' transfer rates maxed around at 41x, a bit ahead of spec. Asus' CPU utilization was lower than that of the internal drive, requiring only 6 percent of the processor's power for 8x transfers versus the internal drive's 10 percent.

The Asus drive's only limitation is true for any external drive: It doesn't play audio CDs through the system speakers. It does include a 1/8 inch headphone jack, volume control, and two buttons that control play/fast forward and stop/eject.

Asus has constructed quite a marvel: The CRW-4012A does everything it's supposed to quickly and quietly.

Asus went all out with the CRW-4012A. It's highly recommended for anyone who wants a fast, quiet, and reliable external CD-RW drive.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Asus' External CD-RW drive is sleek, speedy, and easy to use.

WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Wear Your Condoms and Save Your Driver Disks!

The other day, I decided to install an Audigy 2 card on my work rig: a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 with 1GB of DDR, a Radeon 9700 Pro, and an Intel D845BG motherboard.

I installed the card and proceeded with the driver installation...which was about 95 percent complete when the machine mysteriously rebooted, causing me to put my head in my hands and mutter, "Oh crap!" Eventually, the machine booted, but the hard drive was churning like an Amish farmer making butter. In my Device Manager, something called the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator wasn't working, and neither was my Plextor CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo drive. I muttered some more: "This can't be good."

To make a long story short, the Plug and Play Software Device Enumerator is, apparently, kind of important, not to mention difficult to reinstall. I poked around in my registry, but alas, that didn't help.

After a couple hours of dealing with that (and my IT guy reminding me that I'm "officially not supported by Ziff Davis"), I decided to build an entirely new rig. I yanked out my mobo and hard drive and installed VIA's P4PB-400, 1GB of Corsair memory, and an 80GB hard drive "borrowed" from a machine I reviewed (I hope the manufacturer doesn't remember the machine it sent me had a RAID). I also put in a Radeon 9700 Pro and a 2.0GHz Pentium 4.

The physical installation took about 15 minutes, but I had misplaced the driver disk for the motherboard. Yeah, it took me all friggin' day to get that machine up and running. And the lesson I learned and am sharing with you all—this: Never [illegible] driver disk.

SAVAGE™
Command Your Warriors
Or Engage In Battle
Real Time Strategy Shooter
COMING 2003
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Loyd's Cracked Case

Be the server

By Loyd Case

If you've played such online games as *Unreal Tournament* or *Battlefield 1942*, you've no doubt encountered both good and bad game servers. When you find a good server, it's akin to finding a little patch of heaven: The players are considerate (even as they hunt you down), the team-killers are absent, and your own side always seems to be in the groove. But, after a while, gaming on other people's servers may seem stale. If that's the case, it may be time for you to host your own.

If you've got a broadband connection, this can definitely be fun. But, as with most things PC gaming, there are pitfalls and difficulties to consider.

First, having a broadband connection doesn't mean you can instantly put a server on the Net. You need to be aware of a few details about your setup:

◆ Is it always on, or is it a virtual dial-up connection, such as PPPoE? If it's an always-on connection, putting up a server is as easy as launching an app. But if you have PPPoE, you'll need to set up some type of virtual autodialer to keep the connection live. Many broadband routers can do this.

Trying to run a 32-player *BF1942* server on certain types of connections is like trying to drink an Icee with a cocktail straw.

◆ What does your ISP think about your server scheme? Read the terms and conditions of your ISP contract; you may be expressly prevented from running any type of server.

◆ How many IP addresses do you have? If you have just a single address dynamically assigned by your ISP, then running a 24/7 server may not be practical, even if you're using a router. Still, you can run a server for hours at a stretch (like when you're in bed). You might want to consider investing in a second, dedicated IP address, which often comes at an additional charge.

◆ Do you have a good hardware broadband router? Putting your lone PC on the Net as a server means potential exposure to script kiddies and other unfriendly people who would be very happy to use your system as a slave for their denial of service attacks.

◆ If you have a router, it's worth learning the ins and outs of techniques like port forwarding or port triggering. These allow you to set up game servers without exposing the system to the harsh realities of hacker life on the Net.

◆ Don't forget your upstream speed. Some servers consume relatively little upstream speed. Others, like *Battlefield 1942*, consume as much as 32Kb of upstream speed per player. A typical cable connection maxes out at 128Kbps upstream, or perhaps 256Kbps if you're lucky. Trying to run a 32-player *BF1942* server on this type of connection is like trying to drink an Icee with a cocktail straw. You can do it, but it'll be a frustrating experience.

If you still think you want to set a system up as a game server, then there are just a few other details you need to know. First, find out if the game has a dedicated server package. Most shooters do, and few other multiplayer games do as well. A dedicated server doesn't need a lot of beefy audio or graphics hardware.

Do some upfront research on the particular game you want to serve up. Become familiar with the needed commands, learn about connection logs, and be prepared to log on periodically as the administrator and boot out unruly people. Also, to help attract the right type of players, consider a server name that's somewhat evocative of what you're trying to present to the world.

You can also dip your toes more gradually into this strange and wonderful universe. Start by offering a password protected server that only select people can connect to, and be careful about who gets the password. In the end, being the guy with the server is like being the host of a party: Whether or not people—and you, for that matter—have a good time is directly proportional to the amount of effort and passion you bring to your venture.

Finally, drop me an e-mail at loyd_case@ziffdavis.com and let me know your server name. Some enchanted evening, I just might drop in.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN LEE AND

Tech Medics

You've got questions, I'm not very helpful **By William O'Neal**

"Dude! You're getting a Dell!"

I am thinking about buying a Dell Dimension desktop PC because of the price. In the January issue you said, "One consistent knock against Dell is its machines' use of proprietary motherboards." Do I need to be that concerned about Dell's proprietary motherboards? Are their motherboards trash? Does Dell provide BIOS updates as needed? And lastly, their video and audio are actualy cards and not built into the motherboard, right? I just wanted to make sure that their motherboards aren't flaky before I buy one.

Brent

Dell's motherboards are by no means "flaky" or "trash"; in fact, I've never really had any problems with Dell motherboards. In my experience, though, Dell's motherboards aren't as fast as those made by other manufacturers, like Asus, Intel, or Abit. That said, with top of the line machines, we're talking about rigs that score 15,500 in 3DMark2001 with Dell motherboards, as opposed to 16,000 with competitors' motherboards. It's like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari. As far as support is concerned, Dell offers BIOS updates and I've always had an easy time finding drivers for their products on their website. And lastly, they do offer machines with onboard audio and video, but I would shy away from those configurations. For instance, the machine that I tested in January shipped with ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card and an Audigy 2 soundcard. You can't beat that.

Keep your money

I have a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor and I was wondering if I should go ahead and upgrade to the 3.06GHz processor and wait for Asus to release their new BIOS for Hyper Threading, or just wait till an even faster processor comes out? Also, do you have any idea when Nvidia will release their new videocard?

Oberco

I don't think there's any gaming-related reason to upgrade from a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 to a 3GHz Pentium 4. Hyper Threading (HT) might be cool if you use applications that can take advantage of multiple processors, but since games don't, your money is better spent somewhere else.

"Comparing their motherboards is like comparing a Porsche to a Ferrari."

Spend your money

Which is more powerful, the GeForce3 Ti 500, or the GeForce4 Ti 4200? Both are around the same price on the Fry's Electronics website. Also, can you suggest a good set of speakers in the $50 to $80 range? Thanks for the help, and I don't know why you get so much hate mail—you seem to know your stuff.

Jake

Get the GeForce4 Ti 4200. A good, inexpensive speaker set is the Inspire 2.1 2500 set from Creative Labs.

The Internet is your friend

I decided to get the Radeon 9700 Pro after reading a review by some guy in a gaming magazine. I opened up the box to install it and discovered that it says I need Windows XP, 2000, or ME. I am still running 98SE, since it is pretty stable and has handled everything I do. Do I really need to change to XP for this card? Or is there another option?

Tom B.

I went to mirror.ati.com/support/driver.html and found 98SE drivers.

Emulation nation, baby!

Do any of the PC emulators for Macs actually work? I know you did a Mac review recently, and I like Macs better (I use them for video editing), but I am an addicted gamer. Are any of these good enough to support newer games?

David

I forwarded your message to Raphael Liberatore, *CGW* contributor and Mac guru, and this is what he had to say: "If you're talking about PC emulators like Virtual PC, they don't work well for gaming, especially if you're into shooters like *Operation Flashpoint* and *Counter-Strike*. The lag is noticeable even with a Dual 1GHz and GeForce4 Ti videocard. However, Virtual PC is functional with games like *Celtic Kings* and *Age of Mythology*."

Well, there you have it. You may have to pony up for a PC.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming system By William O'Neal

It's all about the components, kids!

Peop e have been jumping down my throat because of my Lean Machine price. However, it's important to remember that my machine simply serves as a guideline. If you're on a strict budget, then swapping my 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro with a 128MB Radeon 9000 Pro will save you more than $150. Furthermore, going with a $50 16x Toshiba DVD-ROM drive as opposed to my Plextor Combo Drive will shave off an additional $100. If that isn't enough, you can go to a website like Pricegrabber.com and find an OEM copy of Windows XP Home for as low as $85! That alone will save you an additional $215! So, how's that for a lean machine? Methinks that $1,195 ain't too shabby

Watch as Will removes his foot from his mouth!

In the February issue I said, "Asus' A7N8X Deluxe (nForce2-based) is a rock solid Socket-A KT 400 motherboard...." Wel , as many of you pointed out, a motherboard cannot boast both nForce2 and KT-400 chipsets. It is, in fact, an nForce2-based mobo. Now, if Jeff Green wou d just stop making me take those U.S. Air Force-issued Go pills in order to, in his words, "increase my productivity" I'm sure I'd stop making mistakes.

If only Jeff Green would stop making me take Go pills.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	$500
Motherboard	Intel D850EMVR	$170
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM	$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$175
Graph cs processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	$125
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	$600
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Mu timedia keyboard	$35
Mouse	M crosoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$55
Operating system	Windows XP Home Ed tion	$300
TOTAL		$3,060

3DMark2001 SE Pro*

*1024X768X32, NO FSAA

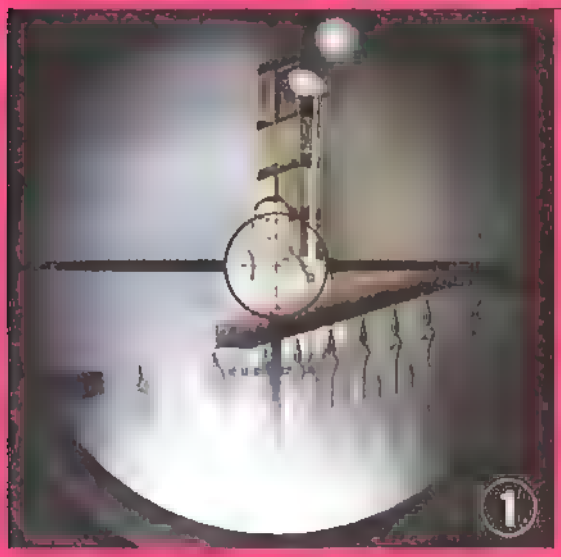
LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Processor (CPU)	1.8GHz AMD Athlon XP 2200+	$140
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2)	$130
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Crucial PC 2700 DDR-RAM	$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Onboard nForce 2 Audio	N/A
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	17" Samsung SyncMaster 768MB	$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$45
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$300
TOTAL		$1,660

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD T. JOE JR.

HITMAN 2: WIN FAST

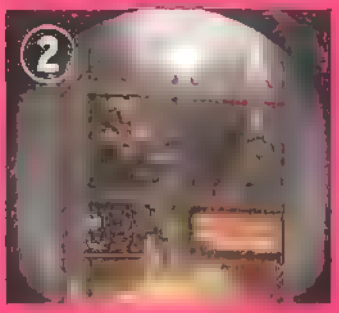
Provided by Eidos and I/O Interactive



ANATHEMA

+ KILL THE DON
+ GAIN ENTRANCE TO THE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT

Enter the [illegible] and then go to the garage and [illegible] that's next to the car. Without being seen or heard, snipe the don from [illegible] compound walls. Go to the basement and [illegible] key. [illegible] base and use the key to [illegible] the base and [illegible] compound and [illegible] road to complete the level.



ST. PETERSBURG STAKEOUT

+ KILL THE CORRECT GENERAL
+ DON'T HARM ANYONE ELSE

Get the [illegible] from the [illegible] Tailor. Go to the apartment building and [illegible] down [illegible] the [illegible] and see the meeting taking place. Wait for Dana's [illegible] and then [illegible] with [illegible] base on the [illegible] complete the level.

KIROV PARK MEETING

+ KILL GENERAL MAKAROV AND HIS MAFIA BUDDY

Get the car bomb from the pick-up spot shown on the map. They go [illegible] and [illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible] to the bottom of the map. Attach a bomb to the underside of the car parked over the manhole next to the manhole closest to the top of the map. Wait for [illegible] and walk by. Now [illegible] him, take his clothes and walk [illegible] to the [illegible] Don't [illegible] Back to your boat to [illegible] the level.

TUBEWAY TORPEDO

+ FIND THE REMOTE BOMB
+ KILL YET ANOTHER GENERAL
+ FREE THE PRISONER

First, find the remote bomb and [illegible] the elevator heading into the basement. It's a lot faster if you kill a guard and take his clothes. Use Stealth all the way to the bottom level of the way there is a security control box you should disable. Kill the [illegible] the second basement and talk to the prisoner. Use your map to find the exit. You'll have to blow up a wall to get the remote bomb to get out the sewer. It's shown as a point of interest on the map.

INVITATION TO A PARTY

+ KILL THE FOURTH GENERAL
+ SECURE THE SUITCASE

Dress as a waiter and [illegible] pick-up spot and [illegible] the map and take a champagne glass from the [illegible] compartment and walk up to the general. He will take the drink. The ambassador will be the only person who [illegible] the map. Wait. Stay with him until he opens the safe. Now him take the suitcase and go back to [illegible]

TRACKING HAYAMOTO

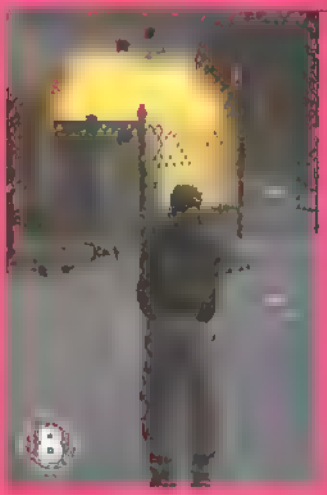
+ KILL HAYAMOTO JR.
+ PLANT A BUG ON HAYAMOTO JR.'S CORPSE

As soon as the [illegible] starts [illegible] to [illegible] front, [illegible] anyone [illegible] anyone in your way. Walk up to Hayamoto Jr. [illegible] everyone else [illegible] Plant the bug [illegible] and run to the exit.

HIDDEN VALLEY

+ THERE ARE REALLY NO OBJECTIVES FOR THIS LEVEL

Just kill a ninja, take his clothes and use the underground passage to reach the exit.



AT THE GATES

+ GET TO THE CASTLE UNDETECTED

If you use a sniper rifle, you can get to the castle without being seen. Shoot the generator that's to the right of the castle. Inside the castle are two security panels that you must activate. Then find the exit.

SHOGUN SHOWDOWN

+ KILL HAYAMOTO SR.
+ SECURE THE MISSILE GUIDANCE SYSTEM

First, stealth your way to the missile guidance system in the museum under the basement. You'll need to keycard to avoid setting off any alarms, all guards carry them. Then head to the top floor and kill Hayamoto. Get in the helicopter on the ground floor to complete the level.

BASEMENT KILLING

+ KILL CHARLIE SIDJAN
+ DISABLE THE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

Obtain the smoke bomb from the pick up spot shown on the map. Set it off anywhere and head to the fire department room. Do it up like a fire can and you'll be given access to the basement via the stairs. Use your map to find Charlie in the basement. Next, head to the elevator near the surveillance screen, in the basement. Shoot the screen and get on the elevator.

THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT

+ PLANT THE HACKING DEVICE
+ EXIT ON THE SKY BRIDGE

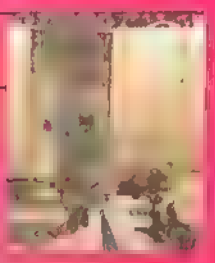
Locate the system administration room on your map. Go there and snatch the keycard off the desk. Then head to the server room. Place the hacking device on the computer and get to the far end of the sky bridge to exit the level. Use a silenced gun on this level or you'll have to kill every single guard.

THE JACUZZI JOB

+ KILL THE OTHER CHARLIE SIDJAN (TWIN BROTHER WITH THE SAME NAME)
+ STEAL THE MONEY
+ STEAL THE STATUE

This is a small level with only a few guards, so your best bet is just to kill everyone on the level. A machine gun will come in handy. Open the safe (an alarm will sound, but don't worry about it) and take the money that's in it. Then grab the statue off the pedestal in the room with the piano. Kill Charlie in the hot tub and call the elevator. A group of security guards will be waiting when the doors open, kill them and get on the elevator to exit the level.

MURDER AT THE BAZAAR



+ KILL LIEUTENANT AHMED ZAHIR
+ GET THE MAP FROM THE LIEUTENANT
+ KILL COL. MOHAMMAD AMIN
+ GET THE KEY FROM THE COLONEL

Go to the guard quarters. Grab the Dragunov rifle and shoot the men outside. This will make Col. Amin run towards you. Snipe him as soon as possible, so he doesn't escape. Pick up the key from his body, then snipe the men outside Lt. Zahir's shack. Enter the shack and kill the lieutenant. Take the map from his body. Then take his clothes and run to the exit.

THE MOTORCADE INTERCEPTION

- GET THE .50-CALIBER SNIPER RIFLE FROM YOUR CONTACT
- KILL THE KAHN
- DON'T KILL ANY U.N. GUARDS

First, snipe every guard on the level; they're easy to kill from a distance, and killing them now will make things easier for you later. Next, find your contact and get the M-195, a .50 caliber sniper rifle. Find a set of stairs that leads to a ladder to the rooftop. Wait there for the convoy. When it's close to you, shoot the engine of the first jeep with the M-195 (only the M-195 rifle will stop a car). Then snipe the Kahn through the windshield of the limo. Run to the exit and don't kill anyone wearing a blue helmet.

TUNNEL RAT

- KILL YUSSEF HUSSEIN
- TRANSPORT THE CARGO TO THE SURFACE

Enter the base via either entrance. Kill only those you must and sneak up to Hussein's room. Kill him and take his clothes. Find the cargo by using your map. Transport it to the surface and kill the guards outside.

TEMPLE CITY AMBUSH

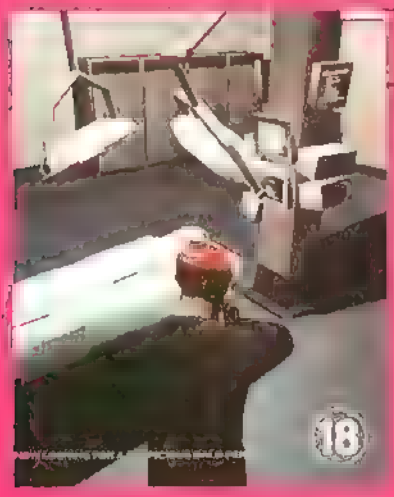
- MEET WITH THE AGENCY'S CONTACT
- MEET WITH YOUR CIA BUDDY
- KILL BOTH ASSASSINS AND TAKE PICTURES OF THEIR BODIES

First, head directly to the red hitman insignia indicated on the map. After you talk to the agency's contact, head to the next insignia, then find the two assassins in the marketplace (one is wearing a N.Y. Yankees hat, the other a yellow *Gilligan's Island*-type hat). Kill them and take their pictures with the camera the second contact gave you. Take the pictures back to the second contact (the red insignia will still be on the map), then find the exit on the map to complete the level.

THE DEATH OF HANNELORE

- GET THE KEY TO THE HIDING PLACE
- KILL DR. VON KAMPRAD
- HIDE DR. KAMPRAD'S BODY
- KILL NO CIVILIANS

Gain entrance to the hospital (killing one guard and taking his clothes is the easiest way). Find the hitman insignia on the map; the key you must obtain is in this room. Next, you will see a point of interest indicated on the first floor map. Go there and put on the white patient clothes (a robe and slippers). On the way to Dr. Kamprad's office, talk to the nurse in the first floor main lobby. She'll take you directly to Dr. Kamprad. Kill the doctor and drag her to the hiding place indicated on the map. Be careful: If anyone sees her dead body, you'll fail the mission. Once she's hidden, find the exit to complete the level.



TERMINAL HOSPITALITY

- KILL THE CULT LEADER

The easiest way to complete this level is with a heavy machine gun. Sneak all the way to the back right-hand side of the main building, where you'll find a locked door. Shoot at it, and guards will run out. Kill everyone that comes out, and then head inside and shoot the cult leader (he'll be on one of the operating tables). Go back to the exit, keep shooting Agent 17 until he leaves, and get in the boat to complete the level.

ST. PETERSBURG REVISITED

- KILL AGENT 17

Regardless of the direction from which you approach the Pushkin building, Agent 17 will be sniping at you from the closest window. To get past him, run straight at him while sidestepping back and forth. Don't run too close to the building or the guards inside will become alerted. Stop running when you are just out of Agent 17's view, and walk to the front door. Once inside, locate Agent 17, sneak behind him, and use the fiber wire on him. Take his clothes and gun, and walk past the guards outside. Then go into the sewer. Snipe one of the two guards that you see here, take his clothes, and walk to the exit to complete the level.

SET UP A RAID CONFIG

Looking to squeeze as much power as possible from your system? Set up a RAID configuration. **By Joel Durham**

Most folks have one hard drive in their computer, and they hardly ever think about it unless something goes wrong. Other than optimizing your hard drive for performance, there's little anyone can do to overcome its primary characteristics in hopes of speeding up access and transfer rates or making it less likely to suffer a data-corrupting heart attack.

RAID, which stands for redundant array of inexpensive (or independent, depending on who you ask) disks, can solve those problems for you. While there are many levels, or types, of RAID, we're going to go through the most commonly used consumer ATA RAID approaches.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

To get started with RAID, you'll need a pair of hard drives (two identical drives work best), one ATA 100/133 cable for each drive, and a RAID controller. While more and more motherboards have RAID controllers built in, they're also available as an expansion card. Check your motherboard documentation to see if there's a RAID controller on the mobo, or just open your case and have a look: There will be two extra 40-pin IDE connectors (often labeled IDE 3 and IDE 4) if you're RAID enabled. If you must purchase a RAID controller card, look for something of high quality, like Adaptec's ATA RAID 1200A.

CONNECTING THE HARD DRIVES

This is the most straightforward step in this handy guide. Connect the drives with the proper cables either to your motherboard's RAID slots or your RAID expansion card. Give each hard drive its own channel (or connector), and make sure its jumpers are set to solo/master. Be sure to secure each drive tightly in its case. Now that you've got all those ribbon cables crammed in there, you might want to tidy them up for the sake of airflow. Use plastic cable ties to hold them in place. Never use something metal, like those little twist ties that come on loaves of bread.

WHICH RAID FLAVOR DO YOU WANT?

The two versions of RAID found on non-server motherboards are RAID 0 and RAID 1. They're very different in their purposes. RAID 0, or striping RAID, writes and reads data simultaneously across both hard drives. Since the work of one drive is being done by two, data transfer to and from the RAID array becomes very efficient.

RAID 1, however, is for data protection. Using RAID 1, the computer writes identical data to both drives in the array, creating a perfect failsafe should one of the drives go bad. It gives you time to swap out the dead drive and replace it, and the computer remains fully functional throughout the repair process.

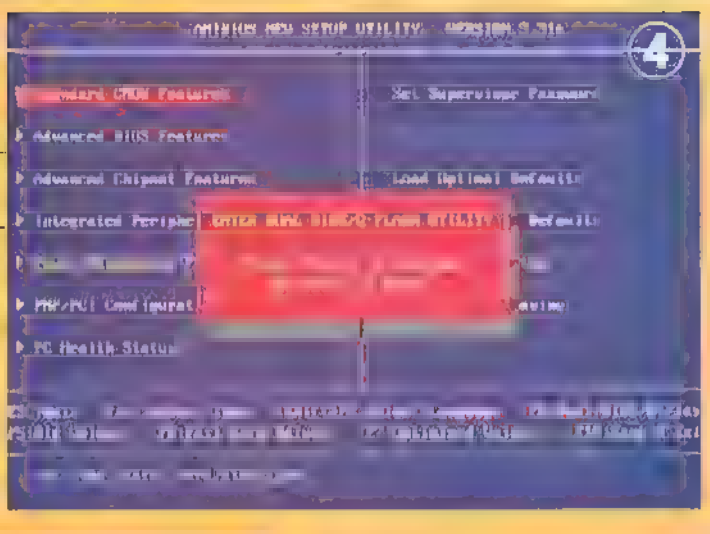
In either case, the computer sees only one drive because the drives work in virtual synergy with one another. In RAID 1, it sees the drives bearing the capacity of only one drive—in other words, if you bought two 120GB drives, RAID 1 will see them as one 120GB drive. In RAID 0, it sees one huge 240GB drive.

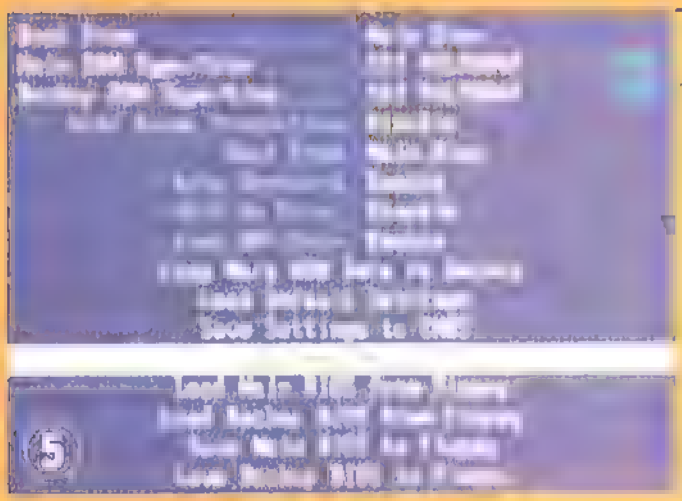
It's worth noting that RAID 0 doubles your chances of losing all of your data to a hard drive failure. Since the data is spread from one drive to the next, when one drive goes down, the other is rendered useless.

URATION

MAKE SURE RAID IS ENABLED

Most RAID equipped motherboards have an option on their BIOS setup programs to disable the RAID controller. Enter your setup program (you can usually do this by pressing DEL during the power-up self test). Check around for a RAID option; depending on the motherboard, it could be anywhere from "advanced chipset features" to "onboard devices." Make sure RAID is enabled. Of course, if you purchased a RAID card you can skip this step.





CONFIGURING THE RAID BIOS

After the initial power-on tests, you'll be given a short grace period to enter the RAID's BIOS screen. This is different from the main PC's BIOS screen. It's in here that you check to see if your drives are recognized and choose how to implement RAID. Remember, RAID 0 is for speed, RAID 1 is for protection.

A typical RAID BIOS will let you choose the RAID mode, the drives you wish to use, and other important options via an easy-to-navigate GUI similar to the BIOS setup program. (Note–ALL of the data on drives added to a RAID array will be lost!)

INSTALLING THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Once you're happy with your RAID settings, you're ready to stuff the drives with Windows (or Linux or BSD or whatever flava pleases you). Your POST screen may not show any drives attached, save for optical drives like CD- and DVD-ROM drives. However, if you enter the RAID BIOS, you should see your two drivers as masters on RAID channels one and two.

Install an operating system by plopping a boot OS disk in the CD drive. Windows Me, 2000, and XP all come bootable. During the process, if the computer fails to see any drives, restart the computer and hit F6 just as Windows Setup starts to load. Then pray that you didn't lose the little floppy disk with the proper RAID drivers, because you need it now.

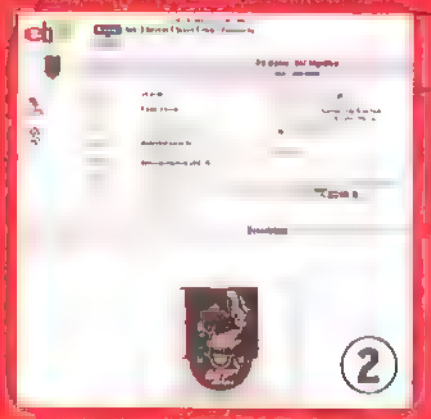
After that, the installation should go smoothly. When the dust settles, you'll have a super-speedy or super-safe system on your hands.

MAKE THE MOST OF NIGHTFIRE

OK, so it was runner-up for Coaster of the Year, but somehow you got suckered into paying $50 for this insult to PC gamers everywhere. What are your options? We show you how to get something more from *NightFire* than utter agony.

EXCHANGE IT AT A RETAILER NEAR YOU

Many stores, from local shops to national chains, offer store credit—and sometimes even cash—for your old games. Expect about 60 percent of the original purchase price for your exchange.

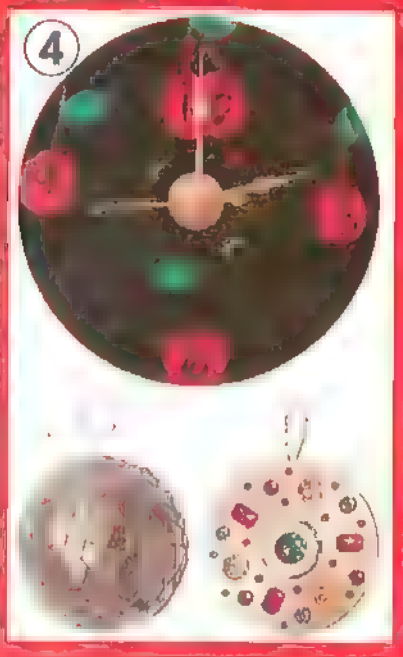


SELL IT ON EBAY

Sure, $10 may be one-fifth of what you paid for it, but it's still more than what you're getting from it collecting dust on the shelf. And you can always make money on the shipping.

BATHROOM RECREATION

Liven up those trips to the john by using the CD as a urinal target. Yes, James Bond can improve your accuracy!



MAKE CRAFTS

You'd be amazed at how many neat objects you can make with useless CDs, and any one of them would be a great gift for the brother who, for Christmas, gave you the complete set of Farscape on VHS that he picked up from his own garage sale.

USE IT AS A CARPET PROTECTOR

James Bond may have a tough time beating those bad guys, but he's great for protecting you from those nasty furniture indents!

Gamer's Edge

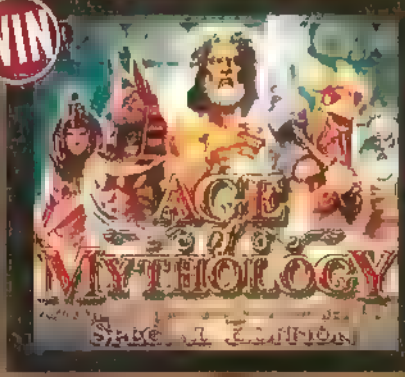
Combat Mission 2

The Russians are coming!

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

On any map with a carrier, spawn as an engineer, get in a plane, and take off. Parachute out over the enemy's carrier and land on it, preferably undetected. Plant mines on the runway, so whenever a plane flies over them it gets destroyed. Use the crates to refill your mines. If you hide up in the bridge and keep yourself out of sight, people will never be able to take off. This works best on a map like Coral Sea or Midway, where virtually the only option is to spawn on a carrier. Also, if possible, get in the back of the plane with a tall gun and mercilessly gun down people who spawn at the back of the carrier.

WIN

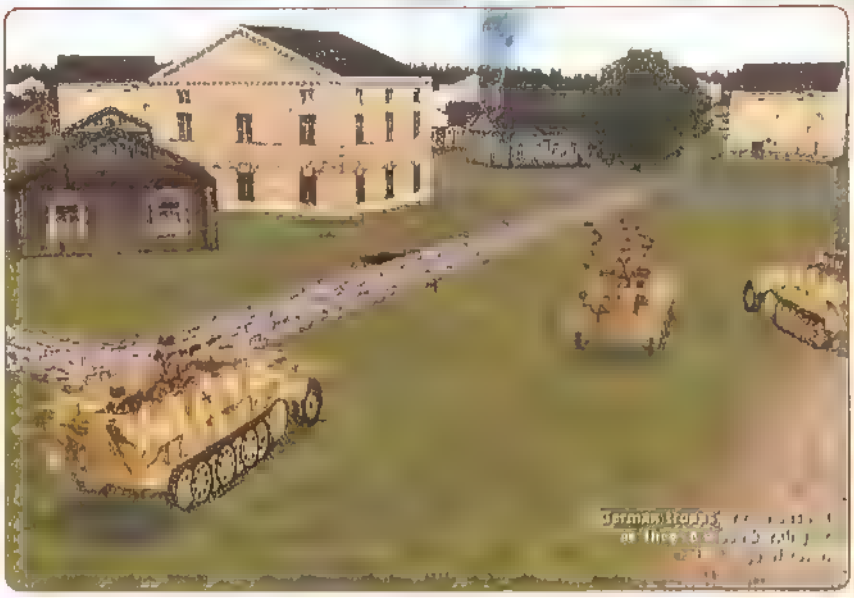


The *Age of Mythology* collector's edition will be coming Chris' way. If you'd like a chance to win *Hitman 2*, send us your dirty tricks for recent games in an e-mail with the subject line "Dirty Trick" to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

COMBAT MISSION

Barbarossa to Berlin

Marxdorf is a small town along [illegible] Berlin, along which Russian troops are advancing in the spring of 1945. The town runs north and south along the road for about a kilometer. There are wheat fields to the west and the Uebser Forest to the east. The Russians, under the command of Tom Gleis, hold the town with a single rifle company. Reinforcements will arrive from the north and out of Uebser Forest to the east. The Germans, under the command of Bruce Garyk, are moving in from the north and east of the wheat fields to the west. At the center of the town is a 300-point victory flag, with 100-point flags at the southern, northern, and eastern edges. The scenario ends after 20 minute-long turns.



Bruce, Turn 1

All good plans need a goal. Mine is to control two of the four objective flags in the town, including the large one in the center. Since I am German, I can count on scoring more casualty victory points than I concede. Combined with the objective-flag count, that should add up to a comfortable victory.

In keeping with the German concept of *schwerpunkt* (concentration of force), I'll focus my initial assault on the flag at the southern end of town. My recon platoon loads up and makes a dash straight for town. The scenario briefing suggests Tom has a weak force in town but will be getting reinforcements. I'll unload near the southern flag and use that as my jumping-off point for a drive on the town center.

At the south edge of the map, I have a single Panzer VIB King Tiger. With its 88mm gun, it can easily control the eastern approach to Marxdorf. Barring the arrival of a platoon of JS-III heavies, Tom should not be able to get anything into town from the east. If he does, he could make mincemeat of my half-tracks. My only concern is that I won't be able to do anything if Allied tanks arrive from the north.

Tom, Turn 1

I'm going to wait till my T-34s are all here, which won't be until about halfway through the scenario. Then I'll make a run from the Letzen Forest to fan out and fire at Bruce's Tiger from a variety of angles. Maybe I can button him up and get a few tanks to town to hold the flags.

In town, I'll hide A company's 2nd platoon, its HQ, and a Maxim machine gun at the southern flag. I don't expect them to live, but hopefully they'll delay anyone approaching from the south. Their job is to hold out long enough for reinforcements to get to the central flag, which is occupied only by A company's 1st platoon. B company, which is arriving with my T-34s, will take a shortcut through the woods to cross a 100-meter gap between the edge of the forest and the north end of town. They'll then work their way toward the center of town to hold the large flag.

Tom, Turn 3

I see six German half-tracks approaching from the south. I was trying to get my tanks to set up a line of sight through the gap in the woods without exposing themselves to the Tiger's 88mm gun. Sgt. Gorishny's tank strayed too far out and was promptly knocked out.

Bruce, Turn 4

So far, so good. Reinforcements from the west will join my lone southern platoon to overwhelm whatever garrison Tom might have at the southern tip of Marxdorf. I have two half-tracks with 75mm guns mounted on them. I'm sending one along the woods to the east and the other along the wheat fields to the west. If they don't attract any attention, they should be in perfect positions to get side shots at any tanks my Tiger can't reach.

Tom, Turn 5

Now, there are also four half tracks and four trucks approaching from the wheat fields to the west. Fortunately, it looks like Bruce is sending all his men to the southern tip of town. If he'd attacked the center of town where the large objective flag is located, I never would have had a chance to get B company there in time.

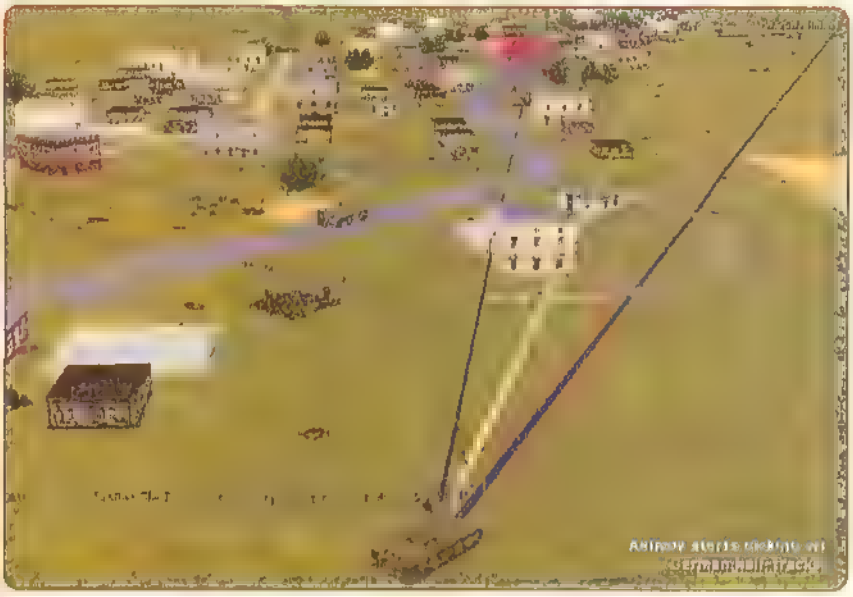
The 2nd platoon of A company has orders to hide and restrict their firing arcs, so they'll only open fire when targets are within 30 meters. Just a little further, Bruce...

Bruce, Turn 6

Ambush! At the southern end of town, Tom's Russians opened fire as I approached the buildings where they were hiding. Several squads took casualties before anyone could react.

Tom, Turn 6

I managed to cut down some infantry as they were disembarking and sent the rest scattering for cover. Now to weather the massive response from the machine guns mounted on all those German half-tracks.



Russians use grenades to drive back a German half-track.

A team of infantry in the Lietzen Forest, where my tanks are amassing, reported a sound contact down the road that borders the woods. Perhaps a German half-track trying to reach the flag on the east end of town?

Tom, Turn 8

Everyone in A company's 2nd platoon is either dead or in retreat, and my machine gun never even got a chance to open fire. I had hoped to delay Bruce on the southern end of town a little longer so B company could hunker down near the center flag. For some reason, Bruce's trucks have unloaded their squads at the edge of a wheat field about 250m out from the town. Now B company keeps slowing down to take potshots at them.

Sgt. Bobrov's T-34 peeked out and killed a lone half-track skulking along the edge of the forest, only to pay for his temerity with a lethal 88mm shell to his turret from that damn Tiger. I'm pulling my tanks back until reinforcements arrive.

Tom, Turn 9

I just got three more T-34s, which gives me eight tanks. Is anyone else coming? I'll give them a few more turns.

Bruce, Turn 11

I've established an anchor point in a large building on the west side of town, about halfway to the central objective flag. I've put an MG42 heavy machine gun on each floor. I'm advancing up both sides of this street, heading for the intersection where a dirt road from the west hits town, which is exactly where the main flag stands. Unfortunately, it's going slower than expected as I leapfrog from building to building trying to keep platoons in command range of their HQ. After I accidentally unloaded them from their trucks prematurely, an entire platoon of panzergrenadiers that arrived by truck are stuck west of town under sporadic fire.

"Sgt. Guriew's T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris."

Tom, Turn 13

OK, I'm moving my tanks out. I've given them orders to fast move to various points in the half kilometer gap between Lietzen Forest and Marxdorf, at which point they will rotate and engage the Tiger. Sgt. Guriew is the first out of the woods. His T-34 takes a hit and blows up in a fountain of flame and debris.

Bruce, Turn 13

Robert Fripp and Brian Eno once put out an album titled *No Pussyfooting*. I'm going to follow their advice, especially since I've been playing far too conservatively up to this point. This game is half over, and I need to move decisively. I'm going all-out for the two story building next to the main flag. Tom's trying to break out of the woods with his tanks, but I'm confident the Tiger can pick them off before they get too far.

Tom, Turn 14

This was a bad idea. I've lost two more T-34s this turn, and two of them have run back into the woods. Cowards. This leaves three tanks out in the open, and they haven't even covered half the distance. The good news is that reinforcements have arrived from the north, including a T-34 which I'm rushing around the west side of town to head off all those half tracks advancing on the center of town. A full-strength platoon has arrived in M5s, which will proceed along the road through the middle of town.

Bruce, Turn 14

Achtung! Panzer! Tom got reinforcements. The M5 half-tracks and whatever infantry they're carrying aren't a problem, but that single T-34/85 is enough to rip through my entire force of half-tracks. I have a few panzerschreck antitank squads, but they aren't far enough forward to cause his tank any trouble. Unless I think of something fast, he'll be able to sit back and pick off my troop carriers one by one. I do have a bit of an ace in the hole: the one surviving half-track armed with a 75mm gun.

Tom, Turn 15

Yikes, some of his half-tracks have 20mm cannons. I'd forgotten about them until one of my M5s was destroyed. I've given the other M5s orders to pull into cover and unload troops. The new platoon will have to bump it to the middle of town on foot. There's about to be a serious firefight over the central flag. I can see Bruce's troops coming with half tracks alongside them.

Bruce, Turn 16

Another ambush. After my last experience, I knew Tom would have troops in the large building near the main objective. That's why I drove two half tracks up to it in the hopes his troops would get nervous and break concealment. Instead, the Russians held their nerve until my squad got inside. They opened fire from the upper floor and drove back my half

tracks with grenades. I have a tenuous foothold in this building, but it will be hard to reinforce.

The half-track with the 75mm gun is almost in position to take a flank shot at the T-34/85 that just arrived from the north.

Tom, Turn 18

All of the T-34s from Lietzen Forest have been knocked out except for the two cowards who ran back into the woods. Never mind the Tiger. They're going to rush the town to try to get an angle on the half-tracks. I'm afraid it's suicide. The eight dead T-34s in the field ahead of them aren't a very encouraging sight.

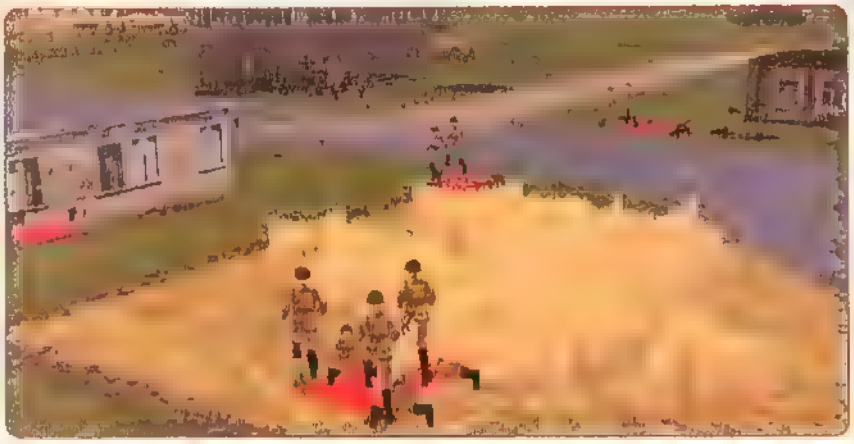
A heated exchange is brewing up around the central objective-flag as B company slowly gets into position and Bruce's half-tracks reinforce his approaching infantry. My lone T-34 from the north, commanded by Sgt. Akimov, is creeping around the west end of town, rounding up the German half-tracks beautifully and scoring kill after kill. At one point, Akimov started traversing his turret to the right instead of firing at all those juicy half-tracks in front of him. There was a lone half-track 500m off to one side that wasn't bothering anyone. Why did Akimov fire at it instead of the ones pinning B company down? That's when I noticed Akimov's target was a SPW 251/9 Stummel with a potentially deadly 75mm gun on it. After a quick kill, he returned his attention to the other half tracks. Three cheers for *Combat Mission*'s tactical A.I. and a medal for Akimov when he gets home.

Bruce, Turn 19

My Tiger has one armor-piercing round left. I'm sure he'll make it count, but without that cork to bottle up Tom's tanks, I have no way to stop him from crushing my troops in a T-34 sandwich.

Tom, Turn 19

The two surviving T-34s that ran off into the woods are closing on the town when I notice dirt being kicked up around them, as if they were being shelled by artillery. The Tiger must be down to high-explosive ammo, which is used against infantry and shouldn't be a threat to my tanks. The Tiger has been declawed! So, I slow my T-34s down to let them pick off half-tracks more effectively. Also, more reinforcements arrive. Three T-34s enter the map from the northwest corner above the wheat fields. Why does the cavalry always wait till the end to come to the rescue?



Russian reinforcements running towards the center of town to consolidate their hold.

"It's a slaughter as the Russians pick off German half-tracks from different angles."

Bruce, Turn 20

This could be the German high tide. My King Tiger is down to firing high-explosive ammo at Tom's tanks. I score a lucky kill on one, but there's no chance I can hold back his armor without proper ammunition. In town, two squads pushing up toward the victory flag turn around just shy of a heavy building that would have given them great cover. I think I can control the central flag, but this is based only on troops that are visible to me. Given the amount of fire I'm taking from buildings across the street, Tom must have lots of infantry near the objective.

Tom, Turn 20

Yikes! One of my T-34s falls prey to an HE round. I didn't think that could happen! So, Sgt. Gubarevich driving my lone surviving T-34 from Lietzen Forest isn't taking his time hunting half-tracks anymore. He's heading full speed toward covering Marxdorf as HE shells land around him. Go, Gubarevich, go.

Bruce, Turn 22

My King Tiger ran out of explosive rounds of any sort, and is now firing smoke! Talk about fanatic troops.

Tom, Turn 23

With a curtain of smoke rising behind him, Gubarevich reaches the safety of Marxdorf and gets back to the business of hunting half-tracks.

Bruce, Turn 23

Out of shells, my King Tiger commander opens the hatch, empties his pistol clip at the one Russian tank now marauding through the town of Marxdorf...and heaves the pistol at the enemy.

Tom, Turn 24

It's a slaughter as Gubarevich, Akimov, and the three Ivan-come-latelys, all in their magnificent T-34s, pick off German half-tracks from different angles. There's no place for them to hide.

Meanwhile, I'm stacking up infantry around the central flag. B company is holding admirably as the newly arrived platoon gets into place. I'm pretty sure I'll control the central flag by the time the scenario is over. However, I've taken heavy losses (Bruce's Tiger tank killed nine T-34s!) that I need to offset by controlling flags. So, Gubarevich and Akimov are going to make a run for the southern flag that Bruce controls. I'm guessing he can't afford to leave anyone to guard it and I'll find it unoccupied.

Bruce, Turn 25

Sometimes success costs you. Probably spurred on by my lack of antitank fire on the west side of town, some of Tom's tanks drove right past my anchor building and gave my panzerschrecks flank shots they couldn't pass up. I got two more T-34/85 kills and kept Tom from taking the southern flag. This gives me valuable casualty points and also consolidates my hold on the building closest to the main flag.

Tom, Turn 26

Argh, I got greedy and lost Gubarevich and Akimov to German antitank squads. I shouldn't have let them get so close to town without infantry support. I spend my last turn getting as many men close to the central flag as I can. With fog of war enabled, you can't be sure whether you control a hotly contested flag.

When the game ends and the smoke clears, it turns out the main flag is indeed mine. However, the battle is not. It was very close, at 2,360 Axis points (100 of which are from controlling the southern flag and the rest are for casualties inflicted) to 2,145 Allied points (500 of which are from controlling three flags in Marxdorf and the rest for casualties inflicted). Game to Bruce Geryk, although I can take small comfort in the knowledge that his Germans will lose the war.

SIMCITY 4:

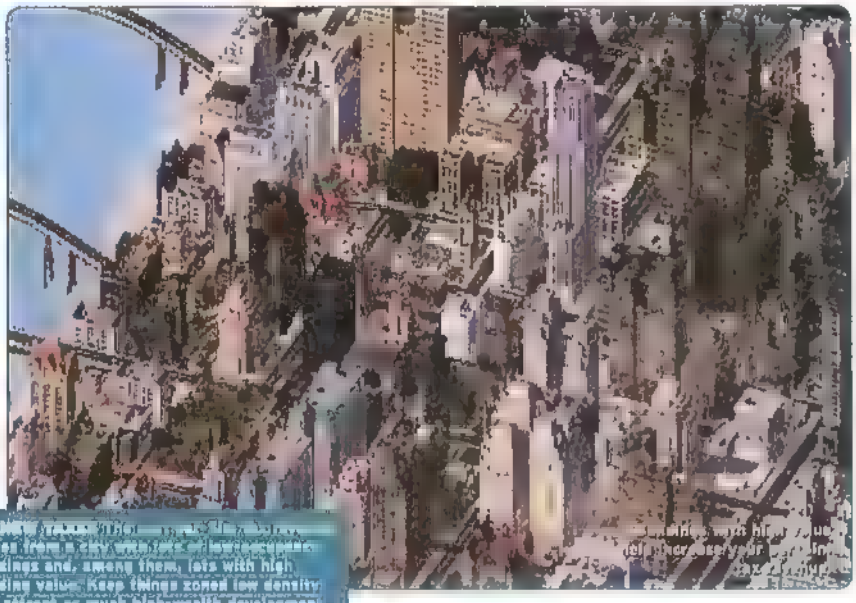
The Money Game

Simoleons make the world go round. Without them, there can be no transportation, zones, or schools—and if the treasury gets empty enough, there'll be no more mayor! Managing the piles of dough is, therefore, one of your primary concerns.

With several changes to the money game in *SimCity 4*, you need great skill to avoid building yourself a money pit of a city. Even late in a city's life, when many seasoned mayors are accustomed to going on financial autopilot, the money game constantly challenges you to stay ahead of monthly expenses and find new ways of enhancing income.

You set taxes in nine categories (by type and wealth level), and they're no longer based on land value. A lot of items—power plants, landmarks, rewards, and parks—now cost money to purchase and maintain. Loans are now amortized, resulting in higher monthly payments but also less confusion.

The current treasury balance is visible in the mayor mode interface. To get behind this number, call up your budget pane. The budget pane puts your city's financial transactions in one easy-to-read place. Clicking on any line item in either the income or expense areas brings up both income and expenses for the chosen item. This helps keep things in perspective and relieves you from having to swap back and forth between detail ledgers.



NO MORE TAXES! Most of a city's income comes from a city's residents' and businesses' buildings and, among them, lots with high building value. Keep things zoned low density and attract as much high-wealth development as your city can bear.

Income

Income is the money you have coming in on a monthly basis. Increasing this amount is harder than increasing expenses, and therein lies the challenge. Taxes are your primary form of income, and no city is successful without a skillful tax strategy. Your city's taxes are based on tax rate, building value, and occupancy.

You set the tax rate for each of the 12 developer types. Commercial office and commercial service are set collectively as commercial. This wealth-type breakdown lets you use your tax rates with fine precision to attract or deter the kind of developer you want. The tax rate does have some side effects, however. The degree of change you make affects mayor rating. Lower taxes to improve your mayor rating on every property of the changed wealth level. Raise them, and you'll make yourself unpopular.

Changing tax rates has an effect on demand. There is, however, always a tax rate that has no effect on demand, but this neutral rate declines as population increases. Lowering a tax rate from this neutral rate stimulates demand, while raising it above neutral dampens demand. The ratio of the rate you select versus the neutral rate dictates the amount of the demand boost/penalty; the more you vary from the neutral rate, the more dramatic the effect.

IN WITH THE OLD. Bulldozing RCI buildings, along with many rewards, landmarks, and business-deal buildings, can cost a fortune. This is meant to encourage the preservation of old development.

RCI buildings in the game have inherent building values. This value is changed only if the property downgrades to a lower wealth type (i.e., an R§§§ building becomes inhabited by R§§). A change of one wealth level drops the building value 25 percent. A two-level drop decreases building value 50 percent.

The only income-producing ordinance is to legalize gambling. If you pass it, you'll receive a guaranteed §100 per month. On the downside, you'll see increased crime. The spoils of incoming neighbor deals (garbage import or power/water export) appear on this line while a deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Because only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, enact incoming deals late in the month. If you accept any business deals by plopping an army base, casino, federal prison, missile range, or toxic waste dump in your city, the income amounts from each appear on this line item.

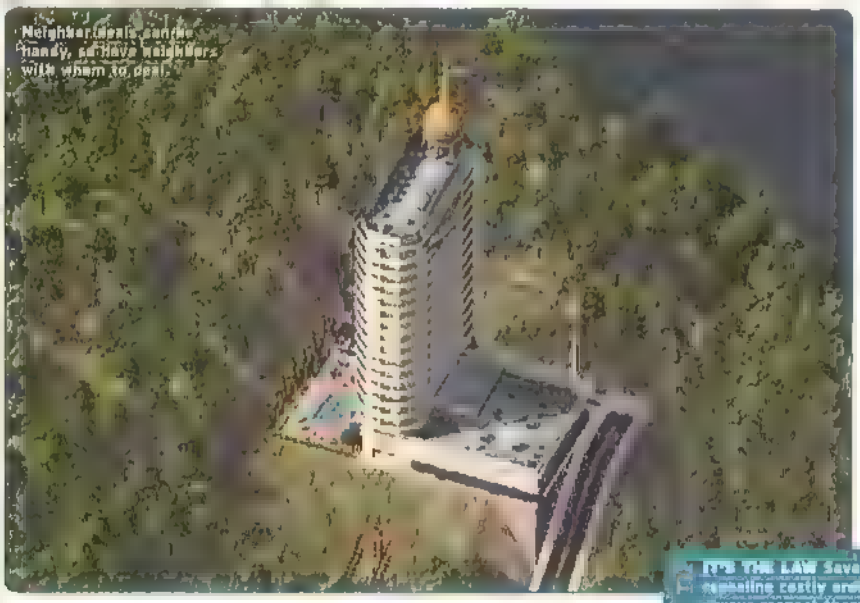
Expenses

Everything you provide your Sims in *SimCity 4* costs money on a monthly basis. You can alter some of these budgets. Many items can be funded locally at individual buildings, or centrally through the budget. If budgets have been set locally, the slider in the budget pane reflects the average funding of all applicable buildings. Moving the slider resets every building to the same funding level.

The transportation department shows monthly costs for all your transit stations, airports, seaports, and transportation networks. Seaports and airports can be overfunded or underfunded individually, but road maintenance and mass transit must be overfunded or

If you can't manage efficiently, the treasury will empty and there'll be no more mayor.

Recreation facilities can raise the desirability of an area, drawing in Sims and raising your tax profit.



When times get tough, you can take out a loan–but it's not always advisable.

underfunded collectively.

Public safety encompasses the fire, police, and corrections departments. Police and fire department funding reflects in their coverage area and effectiveness. Fire stations and police stations are funded individually (via the query box of each station) or collectively. The department of corrections can only be funded collectively through the budget ledger.

Health and education systems are funded locally, but you can collectively control them from here. An underfunded health and education structure can operate at top grade if the demand for the facility is less than its capacity. Structures that are over capacity will have strikes regardless of funding level. Health and education can be funded locally or collectively.

The utilities department covers all of your utility infrastructure, including power, water, and garbage. The sanitation department must be funded collectively. Power plants can be funded locally or collectively here, but power lines can only be funded collectively. No water elements are individually funded. Water tower and pump capacity can be altered by the level of funding.

All city ordinances are enacted through this budget entry. Some don't appear in the list until you meet certain prerequisites.

The costs of all outgoing neighbor deals (garbage export or power/water import) appear on this line as long as the deal is in effect. Click on the line item to see and make both incoming and outgoing deals and opportunities. Only income and expenses on the ledger on the month's last day factor into the actual (rather than projected) budget, so enact outgoing neighbor deals early in the month (as with the income entry).

City beautification includes parks, recreation structures, and landmarks. Parks and recreation structures are funded through the collective parks and recreation funding slider. All landmarks are included in one line item, and funding is controlled collectively in the budget.

If you have any governmental rewards (e.g., mayor statues, city hall, bureau of bureaucracy, etc.), they're funded collectively from the government budget.

IT'S THE LAW Save money by repealing costly ordinances; you can always reenact them when things improve. Watch out, though: Repealing these likely will diminish your tax base.

HIT THE HIGHWAY Never reduce your road maintenance budget; it ends up costing you more money in the long run and causing more problems than it solves.

Loans

When times are tough and you need cash, take out a loan. It's not always advisable, but you can do it. You can borrow up to §200,000 for each loan, and carry §2,000,000 in total outstanding debt or 10 loans at any time. Money can be loaned in §5,000 increments over a period of 10 years at 8.5 percent. Payment amounts are amortized; every payment includes a portion of principal and a portion of interest.

Only take out loans when you anticipate increasing revenue in the near future. This can be for any reason, but usually involves what you're spending the loan proceeds on (mass transit, zoning, etc.). If you're already operating at a deficit, a monthly loan payment increases it. Unless you can increase revenue or reduce expenses to cover your existing expenses plus the monthly payment, the loan only delays your dive toward impeachment.

When you're operating at a profit or need to make a large capital investment that will (directly or indirectly) increase revenue enough to cover the loan, a loan is a good idea. If traffic in your city is terrible and you need a good public transportation system, a loan may get things moving. If you think lessening your traffic problem will affect your tax collections (Sims returning to abandoned homes and back into the tax base), then take out a loan for a subway system. This is good city management. Taking out a loan to buy a landmark or stop the bleeding of a deficit budget is not.

Overfunding and underfunding

The funding sliders are great weapons in the bottom-line war. They can save money or buy you time. On the other hand, they can undercut and sabotage your city if not used properly, costing you more in the long run than leaving everything at full funding.

Funding above 100 percent can get you nice benefits, but also can be a waste of money. Its effect depends on the department. For many buildings, such as fire stations and police stations, funding is tied to efficiency. Raising funding above 100 percent provides moderate increases in efficiency (+10 percent efficiency at 120 percent funding), usually not worth the extra money. Other kinds of buildings, such as schools and healthcare buildings, link funding to grade (capacity versus usage). In these cases, funding beyond 100 percent expands capacity (though less so than changes between 0 and 100 percent). Such a building is considered underfunded only if the set funding level causes it to operate over capacity.

Underfunding is an attractive way to save money and, if done selectively, can be effective. It also can be costly and disastrous, especially in important departments. You may get away with it for a while, but the longer you do it, the longer you risk a strike. Strikes occur in some departments if funding or grade fall below certain levels. When a department is on strike, effectiveness drops to 20 percent for the duration of the strike. Strike conditions vary by department.

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IF YOU PURCHASED A SUBSCRIPTION TO THIS OR ANOTHER MAGAZINE, THE FOLLOWING PROPOSED CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT MAY AFFECT YOUR RIGHTS

This notice describes a proposed nationwide settlement of class action lawsuits relating to magazine subscriptions that has been reached in In Re Magazine Antitrust Litigation, 00 Civ. 4889 (S.D.N.Y.) (the "Action"), and preliminarily approved by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York (the "Court").

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR THE PAYMENT OF MONEY OR OTHER COMPENSATION TO THE CLASS MEMBERS BUT INSTEAD SOLELY ADDRESSES CERTAIN INDUSTRY RULES AND PRACTICES THAT WERE DIRECTLY CHALLENGED IN THE ACTION AS BEING UNLAWFUL (SEE "THE CLAIMS IN THE LAWSUIT" SECTION BELOW).

This announcement is intended to give class members notice under Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Order of the Court dated September 20, 2002, as modified on September 30, 2002, that a hearing will be held before the Hon. Richard Conway Casey on May 27, 2003 at 11:00 a.m. to determine whether: (a) to certify the proposed settlement class under Rule 23; (b) the proposed settlement of the Action is fair, reasonable and adequate; (c) a final judgment should be entered dismissing the Action with prejudice to the class members; and (d) to approve class counsels' application for attorneys' fees and expenses. The rest of this notice summarizes the terms of the proposed settlement. You can obtain a copy of the settlement agreement, the Consolidated Amended Class Action Complaint (the "Complaint"), and a list of the magazine subscriptions at issue in the Action, at www.magazine.org or by writing to The Garden City Group, Inc., the Administrator of the Notice Program, at Magazine Antitrust Litigation, P.O. Box 9000 # 6041, Merrick, NY 11566-9000 (the "Administrator"). ANY QUESTIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING THIS NOTICE OR THE SETTLEMENT SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE ADMINISTRATOR AT THE ADDRESS LISTED ABOVE OR BY CALLING 1-888-210-0118. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE ADMINISTRATOR WITH QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR CURRENT SUBSCRIPTIONS UNLESS THOSE QUESTIONS RELATE TO THE CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT.

DO NOT CONTACT THE COURT, COUNSEL TO THE PARTIES, COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, OR ANY PUBLISHER REGARDING THIS NOTICE. THE ADMINISTRATOR, WHERE APPROPRIATE, WILL REFER ANY QUESTIONS TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON.

THE CLAIMS IN THE LAWSUIT

The Complaint was filed in this Action in or about October 2000, against the Magazine Publishers of America ("MPA"), a consumer magazine trade association, and fourteen magazine publishing companies (the "Publisher Defendants"). The Complaint alleged an agreement among the Publisher Defendants and the MPA to set the minimum price of or maximum discount on magazine subscriptions through the enactment of MPA Guideline 4(a) and/or the collective action among publishers to adhere to the ABC's 50% Rule (as referred to in ¶45 of the Complaint) or the similar Rule of the BPA International pertaining to its definition of "paid circulation." The Complaint asked the Court to eliminate or modify Guideline 4(a) and to award damages that allegedly were suffered by consumers who purchased subscriptions to the Publisher Defendants' magazines.

The defendants have denied the material allegations of the Complaint. The parties have now agreed to settle the Action in its entirety. On September 20, 2002, the Court preliminarily approved the settlement.

TERMS OF THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT

In the proposed settlement, the defendants have agreed to do two things: (i) the MPA shall delete in its entirety MPA Guideline 4(a); and (ii) the defendants shall defray the costs incurred in connection with the Action, including the costs of the Notice program involving notifying class members of the terms and conditions of the proposed settlement and the Plaintiffs' actual attorneys' fees and expenses awarded by the Court up to $1.1 million.

In exchange, the Plaintiffs have agreed that, if the settlement is approved, the Court will enter a judgment dismissing the Action with prejudice, and the named Plaintiffs and all class members who have not duly opted-out of the class will be deemed to be subject to the release in this case, which provides as follows: "As of the date on which the Agreement is Finally Approved, the Publisher Defendants and the MPA . . . shall be completely released, acquitted, and forever discharged, from any and all claims, demands, actions, suits, causes of action, injuries or damages, whether class, individual or otherwise in nature, that Plaintiffs, the Class Members or each of them, in his or her capacity as a subscriber to a magazine, ever had or now has, in law or equity, under federal or state law, relating to an agreement to set the minimum price of or maximum discount on magazine subscriptions through the enactment of MPA Guideline 4(a) and/or the collective action among publishers to adhere to the ABC's 50% Rule (as referred to in ¶45 of the Amended Complaint) or the similar Rule of the BPA International pertaining to its definition of 'paid circulation.'"

The release also releases class action claims that were previously brought (but subsequently dismissed without prejudice) by a plaintiff in the State Court in San Diego, California, who asserted similar allegations against the defendants albeit based on violations of California state laws. The California action was styled Coossan v. Hearst Corp., et. al., No. GIC 752985. A copy of the Coossan Complaint can be obtained at www.magazine.org.

WHO ARE THE PUBLISHER DEFENDANTS?

The Publisher Defendants are: Condé Nast Publications, Inc.; Gruner + Jahr Printing and Publishing Company; Hachette Filipacchi Media U.S., Inc. (f/k/a Hachette Filipacchi Magazines, Inc.); The Hearst Corporation; International Data Group, Inc.; Meredith Corporation; Newsweek, Inc.; Primedia, Inc.; Reader's Digest Association, Inc.; Rodale Inc.; Time Inc.; Time4Media, Inc. (f/k/a Times Mirror Magazines, Inc.); TV Guide, Inc. and Ziff-Davis Publishing, Inc.

WHO IS IN THE CLASS?

Class Members are those persons who purchased a subscription to this publication or to other publications that were published by any of the Publisher Defendants during the period from and including July 1, 1998 up to and including April 15, 2002 (the "Class"). For purposes of determining inclusion in the Class, it does not matter whether you purchased your subscription from one of the Publisher Defendants, or through agents, subagents or other third party marketers. You are not, however, a member of the Class if you did not purchase a magazine subscription within the time period stated above, or if you purchased your magazines only at newsstands.

YOUR RIGHT TO OBJECT TO THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT

You have the right to appear, in person or by counsel, at the hearing on the proposed settlement in order to comment on, or object to, the terms of the proposed settlement, its adequacy or reasonableness and/or the award of attorneys' fees and expenses to class counsel. However, you will only be heard at that time if you first, by May 5, 2003, (a) file with the Court a notice of your intention to appear, which includes the basis for your objection, a statement identifying the magazines to which you subscribed, and the approximate time period of each such subscription; and (b) serve copies of the notice (and all other papers you intend to rely upon) by hand or first class mail on Plaintiffs' co-lead counsel, Bruce E. Gerstein, Esq., Garwin, Bronzaft, Gerstein, & Fisher, LLP, 1501 Broadway, Suite 1416, New York, NY 10036 and H. Laddie Montague, Jr., Esq., Berger & Montague, 1622 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103, and on Defendants' coordinating counsel, Lawrence I. Fox, Esq. at McDermott, Will & Emery, 50 Rockefeller Plaza, 11th Floor, New York, New York 10020.

YOUR RIGHT TO OPT-OUT OF THE SETTLEMENT

ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO APPEAR AT THE HEARING, YOU HAVE NO OBLIGATION TO DO SO. If you do not wish to participate in or be bound by the proposed settlement, you can exclude yourself (i.e., "opt-out"). To opt out, you MUST send a request for exclusion in an envelope POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN May 5, 2003 to the Administrator of the Notice Program Magazine Antitrust Litigation, P.O. Box 9000 # 6041, Merrick, NY 11566-9000. The request for exclusion must state your full name, the magazine(s) to which you subscribed and the approximate time period of each subscription, and the address to which your magazines were sent. IF YOU DO NOT EXCLUDE YOURSELF, you will be barred from prosecuting any legal action against the MPA or its members and the Publisher Defendants to the full extent of the release set forth in the "Terms of the Proposed Settlement" section above.

EXAMINATION OF PAPERS AND INQUIRIES

For a more detailed statement of the matters involved in the Action, including the Complaint, the settlement agreement, motion papers and certain orders of the Court, you may visit the office of the Clerk of the United States District Court, 500 Pearl Street, New York, New York, during business hours. Copies of the papers relating to the settlement are also available at www.magazine.org.

Scorched Earth

Moot Gesture of the Year

CGW's awards don't mean nothing **By Robert Coffey**

For this month's Scorched Earth, I had planned to play virtual ferret in the Skinner box that is *The Sims Online* to see just how long it took the pigeons to kick me out of their coops. Alas, it proved dishearteningly easy to get systematically banned everywhere, the magic banishment words coming courtesy of the 6-year-old catchphrase machine that is my son: "Talk to the weenis." Guileless, direct, a phrase of simple beauty and unmatched efficacy, it pretty much killed the column, thanks to the wussified inhabitants of Alphaville and Blazing Falls.

Thus, I was left stewing about how there was no way I was going to give the denizens of this spiritless netherworld my vote in the impending Game of the Year über-meeting, and if anyone else on the staff so much as suggested it, I vowed to surgically staple them to the chittering skinless siamang that was our last intern, damning them to a torrent of *Farscape* trivia and his unsettling fixation with nude male Greek statuary. OK, I admit I get a little worked up at times. But as I happily reflected upon the image of my coworkers desperately blinding themselves with melon ballers in order to blot out the image of the unctuous demi-human cruelty sutured to their hip, I thought, "What is wrong with me?" No really, I did. After all, it's not like our awards mean what they once did.

Remember back when this magazine ran roughly 3,000 pages a month? Back then we had a staff, two score and twelve of the hardiest gaming men the world had ever seen. Did any other mag have editors whom were present at the dawn of our hobby? We did, and we were better for it. Did any other mag boast a toothless old prospector and a guy who dressed like a clown? We did, and we were, um, well, we sure were different for it. And every one of these swarthy, exacting bastards, clad in the exact same grey mock turtleneck, would once a year gather in a verdant, dew-bejeweled glen under a blazing full moon, slathering bear grease on their rippled, oak-hard bodies as they descended into the pit to grapple with their brethren, until one would emerge victorious, roaring a wordless epiphany of triumph, the mangled ear of their opponent clenched in their blood-smeared teeth. That was how Adventure Game of the Year used to be decided.

Talk to the weenis.

But now, our staff diminished by rampant cannibalism and the loss of advertising dollars, the awards meeting is but a shadow of its former glory. There are fewer of us, less conflict, less diversity of opinion, and I can't help but wonder if we're not the worse for it. Would *Grand Theft Auto III* have cruised to victory if there were one old-school hex-based gamer left on our staff? Probably, but I can't help but feel that it would have earned its status a little more if there had been stronger opposition.

I believe that the paper-triangle football playoffs we use to break ties nowadays produce more right decisions than wrong. But our decisions remain moot in the extreme. Why? Because while there are fewer of us, there are more of them—more of the sweaty guy in a dorm room plastered with Howard the Duck posters who's got his own website so he can try to con a few free games out of a gullible PR person. And when this leech manages to score a couple copies of *Hooters' Road Trip* and *Mystery of the Nautilus*, and not *Hitman 2* or *Morrowind* or any real game, well, what kind of crap do you think he's voting on for Game of the Year? Next time you're browsing EB or visiting Wal-Mart or burgling the house of the people next door, take a good look at the game boxes. There's a Game of the Year version of just about everything, right up to *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing*. Great for the marketing weasels, awful for the gamers. This is the same slack selection process behind the millions of "World's Greatest Dad" t-shirts stretched over every dithering fat bastard slowing up the Orange Julius line at the mall whilst—tragically—I go unrecognized.

Fortunately, despite the winnowing of our staff, it seems pretty clear that with each and every one of us a towering genius, the quality and accuracy of our awards is as sound as sound can be. But what to do about the tribes of halfwits muddying the crystal-clear blue waters of *CGW*'s unassailable imprimatur? A suggestion. The next time you're accosted by a garishly emblazoned box declaring *Soldier of Fortune 2: Game of the Year*, respond like so: Talk to the weenis. You'll be glad you did.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK HORNADY

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